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Democratic Services Section
Legal and Civic Services Department
Belfast City Council
City Hall
Belfast
BT1 5GS

4th June 2026

MEETING OF THE PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

Dear Alderman/Councillor,

The above-named Committee will meet in the Lavery Room - City Hall on Tuesday, 9th June, 2026 at 5.15 pm, for the transaction of the business noted below.

You are requested to attend.

Yours faithfully,

John Walsh

Chief Executive

AGENDA:

1. **Routine Matters**

   (a) Apologies

   (b) Minutes

   (c) Declarations of Interest

2. **Restricted**

   (a) Greenwich Leisure Limited - Six-Monthly Update re: Contact Compliance and Performance (Pages 1 - 14)

   (b) Healthwise and Physical Activity Referral Programmes - Update (Pages 15 - 24)

   (c) Resources and Fleet Waste - Update (Pages 25 - 96)

   (d) Pitch Partnership Agreements - Legal Matters (Pages 97 - 104)

   (e) Partnership Agreements 2026/27 (Pages 105 - 110)

3. **Matters referred back from the Council/Motions**

   (a) Northern Ireland Housing Executive - Tenancy Succession Policy (Pages 111 - 112)

   (b) Policy Prohibiting Key Lock Boxes Associated with Short-term Holiday Lets (Pages 113 - 114)

4. **Committee/Strategic Issues**

   (a) Food Service Delivery Plan 2026/27 (Pages 115 - 138)

   (b) Consultation on Proposed Animal Welfare Policy Reforms in Northern Ireland (Pages 139 - 572)

5. **Operational Matters**

   (a) Pride of Place Awards 2026 (Pages 573 - 576)

   (b) Framework for Supporting Sports Clubs/Individuals Travelling to Events outside Belfast (Pages 577 - 584)

   (c) Party Political Use of Community Centres and Bowling Centres (Pages 585 - 588)

   (d) Off-Street Car Parking - Update (Pages 589 - 596)

   (e) Proposals for RAPID Drugs' Disposal Bin - Ormeau Park (Pages 597 - 600)

   (f) Update on The Tobacco and Vapes Act 2026 (Pages 601 - 604)

   (g) Use of Friar's Bush Cemetery - Update (Pages 605 - 608)

   (h) Requests for the Use of Parks for Events (Pages 609 - 612)

   (i) Dog Fouling Action Plan - Post Mounted Bins Update (Pages 613 - 618)

   (j) Dual Language Street Signs re: 'Long Streets' (Pages 619 - 628)

   (k) Proposals for Dual Language Street Signs - Monthly Report (Pages 629 - 634)

   (l) Dual Language Street Signs - Streets with Potential Adverse Impacts (Pages 635 - 638)

6. **Issues Raised in Advance by Members**

   (a) Bulky Waste Collection Response Time - Councillor R. Brooks to raise

   (b) Refuse Bags Left on Pavements in the City Centre/Arterial Routes - Councillor de Faoite to raise

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PEOPLE AND COMMUINITIES COMMITTEE

Belfast City Council

Subject:	**Notice of Motion – Northern Ireland Housing Executive – Tenancy Succession Policy**
Date:	9th June, 2026
Reporting Officer:	Barry Flynn, Committee Services Officer.
Contact Officer:	As above.

Restricted Reports				
Is this report restricted?	**Yes**		**No**	X

Call-in				
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	**Yes**	X	**No**	

1.0	**Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues**
1.1	To consider a motion re: Northern Ireland Housing Executive – Tenancy Succession Policy, which was referred to the Committee by the Standards and Business Committee at its meeting on 26th May 2026.
2.0	**Recommendations**
2.1	The Committee is requested to note the receipt of the motion and to take such action thereon as may be determined.
3.0	**Main report**
3.1	**Key Issues** At the meeting of the Standards and Business Committee held on 26th May 2026, the following motion, which was proposed by Councillor Canavan and seconded by Councillor Black was referred to the Committee for consideration:
3.2	**Northern Ireland Housing Executive Tenancy Succession Policy** This Council, notes: • The ongoing housing crisis across the North and the increasing demand for permanent social housing;

- That many families live for long periods in Housing Executive properties and develop vital community roots;

- That the current Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) succession policy prevents family members who have lived long-term in a property from succeeding a tenancy following the death of the tenant, where succession has already previously occurred (for example, between husband and wife) and

- That this policy can lead to unnecessary displacement, eviction, hardship, and further breakdown of family units.

This Council believes:

- That housing policy should prioritise stability for families and communities;

- That family members or partners who have contributed to and depended on the household should not face eviction due to restrictive succession rules; and

- That social housing should be managed in a way that balances fairness, community stability, and objective housing need.

Accordingly, this Council resolves:

- To write to the Minister of the Department for Communities calling on him to undertake a legislative review of the NIHE tenancy succession policy;

- To request the introduction of safeguards to prevent unnecessary eviction or relocation following the death of a tenant, particularly where long-term residence and established community ties exist;

- To support the development of a fair and community-aligned succession policy that protects households while ensuring that social housing is allocated on the basis of objective need; and

- To seek engagement with residents' groups, community organisations, and elected representatives in the development of any revised succession policy.

3.3 **Financial and Resource Implications**

None at this stage as there is no commitment to proceed with the Notice of Motion. Details of any financial and resource implications will be reported at a subsequent meeting.

3.4 **Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment**

None associated with this report at this stage of the process.

PEOPLE AND COMMUINITIES COMMITTEE

Belfast City Council

Subject:	**Notice of Motion – Policy Prohibiting Key Lock Boxes Associated with Short-term Holiday Lets.**
Date:	9th June, 2026
Reporting Officer:	Barry Flynn, Committee Services Officer.
Contact Officer:	As above.

Restricted Reports				
Is this report restricted?	**Yes**		**No**	X

Call-in				
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	**Yes**	X	**No**	

1.0	**Purpose**
1.1	To consider a motion re: 'Policy Prohibiting Key Lock Boxes Associated with Short-term Holiday Lets', which was referred to the Committee by the Standards and Business Committee at its meeting in May.
2.0	**Recommendation**
2.1	The Committee is requested to consider the motion and note that, if adopted, a subsequent report will be submitted to consider further the implications associated with the motion.
3.0	**Main report**
3.1	**Key Issues** At the meeting of the Standards and Business Committee on 26th May 2026, the following motion, which was proposed by Councillor McKay, and seconded by Councillor Carson was referred to the Committee for consideration:
3.2	**Policy Prohibiting Lockboxes associated with short-term holiday lets** "That this Council introduces a policy prohibiting lockboxes from being installed on any property, wall, railing, fence, or street furniture other than the dwelling to which they relate. This measure is needed because the proliferation of lockboxes in areas in Belfast particularly the inner city with high concentrations of short-term holiday lets is causing visual clutter and environmental harm, while also diminishing the amenity of residential streets and shared spaces, the Council should also ensure

	that any breach is subject to enforcement action and removal. This approach is consistent with action already taken by other councils and city authorities to restrict or remove external key boxes associated with short-term holiday lets." Since the Committee has a remit for regulatory matters, the motion was referred in the first instance for its consideration. Councillor McKay and/or Councillor Carson will be in attendance to speak to the matter and provide additional scope and context.
3.3	**Financial and Resource Implications** None at this stage as there is no commitment to proceed with the motion. If adopted, the details of any financial and/or resource implications will be outlined at a subsequent meeting.
3.4	**Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment** None at this stage.

PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

Belfast City Council

Subject:	Food Service Delivery Plan 2026-2027
Date:	9 June 2026
Reporting Officer:	Siobhan Toland, Director of City Services
Contact Officer:	David Cuthbert, City Protection Manager

Restricted Reports

Is this report restricted? **Yes** [ ] **No** [X]

Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.

Insert number [ ]

1. Information relating to any individual
2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual
3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information)
4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter
5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained
6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction
7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime

If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?

After Committee Decision	[ ]
After Council Decision	[ ]
Sometime in the future	[ ]
Never	[ ]

Call-in

Is the decision eligible for Call-in? **Yes** [X] **No** [ ]

1.0	**Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues**
1.1	The Food Standards Agency, in their monitoring and oversight role, require all NI District Councils to prepare an annual Food Service Delivery Plan which sets out the Council's key functions and planned activities for delivery of food hygiene, food standards and other food safety related responsibilities.
1.2	This report presents Belfast City Council's draft Food Service Delivery Plan for the 2026/27 year and seeks Committee approval of the draft plan so that it can be submitted to the Food Standards Agency for review.
2.0	**Recommendation**
2.1	The Committee is requested to approve the draft Belfast City Council Food Service Delivery Plan 2026-2027
3.0	**Main Report**
	Background – Food Safety Service
3.1	The Council's Food Safety Unit works with local businesses to build compliance with Food Law and to ensure that food produced and sold in Belfast is safe and can be trusted. This not only protects the consumer and public health but also protects and enhances the reputation of the city, our local businesses and their competitiveness, thereby supporting economic growth.
3.2	Food related illness costs the local economy, individual businesses and the consumer-people may suffer from food poisoning and food related illness, potentially resulting in hospital admissions for some patients, and costing the Belfast economy through work related absences and consumer claims.
3.3	To protect consumers, the Council is required to implement a programme of planned food hygiene and food standards inspections for food businesses across the city. These inspections are programmed based on food safety risks presented by the businesses. Food sampling programmes are also delivered throughout the year, and the Council responds to and investigates food complaints as well as cases of food borne illness.
3.4	The Food Hygiene Rating Act (NI) 2016 requires businesses to display their food hygiene rating, improving the opportunities for consumers to make informed choices and encouraging improved compliance. Currently at least 86% of food businesses are rated as 3, 4 or 5 (broadly compliant or better).
3.5	An important element of the Food Safety service includes work to ensure allergen requirements placed on food business are being adhered to, protecting consumers who have food allergies from harm (it is estimated that around 2 million people living in the UK have a food allergy). Following a number of high-profile cases resulting in fatalities, legislation was introduced requiring additional labelling for food that is prepacked for direct sale (PPDS) i.e. food that has been packed on the same premises from which it is being sold. Council officers monitor compliance and offer support to businesses during inspections.
3.6	The Council's imported food control function continues to facilitate trade while ensuring food safety and public health is protected by undertaking official controls at Belfast Port. From the 1st October 2023 the Windsor Framework introduced the Northern Ireland Retail Movement Scheme (NIRMS "green lane" scheme) to facilitate qualifying traders to move retail goods from GB to NI. Whilst DAERA oversee the NIRMs arrangements, both DAERA and local Councils undertake official controls on other food products arriving at NI ports that are

	destined for, or at risk of entering the EU (red lane). For Belfast City Council this includes controls on fish products, high risk food not of animal origin, plastic kitchenware from China and Hong Kong, and organic products. Whilst the UK and EU have announced intention to negotiate a Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) Agreement in the future, in the meantime they have restated their commitment to full and timely implementation of the existing agreements in advance of any future SPS arrangement. The Port Health service continues to work closely with the Food Standards Agency, DAERA, DEFRA, other government departments, local businesses and other stakeholders to ensure adequate arrangements are in place to facilitate trade and protect consumers.
	Annual Food Service Delivery Plan
3.7	Each year, the Council produces a Food Service Delivery Plan which sets out the activities, techniques and approaches to be taken during the year to support businesses in ensuring food safety, food standards and to promote informed healthy choices. The Plan provides the basis on which the Council's regulatory activities are monitored and audited by the Food Standards Agency, and it is a requirement that it is presented to the Council for approval.
3.8	The Food Standards Agency (FSA) has a key role in overseeing local authority regulatory activities to ensure that official controls are delivered. Powers to enable the FSA to monitor and audit local authorities are contained in the Food Standards Act 1999. The Food Law Code of Practice on local food law enforcement has been produced by the Agency, in conjunction with local authority representative bodies, to provide guidance on how regulatory service plans should be structured and what they should contain. The Belfast City Council Food Service Delivery Plan for 2026/27 has been drafted in line with requirements of the FLCOP.
3.9	The FLCOP requires that Food Service Delivery Plans should be submitted to the relevant Member forum, in this case the People and Communities Committee, for approval. This is to ensure local transparency and accountability. The Food Service Delivery Plan for 2026/2027 is included in Appendix 1.
3.10	Members should note that during the Covid pandemic (between 2020 and 2022), food hygiene and food standards inspection programmes were significantly impacted, as visits were paused due to business closures during periods of lock down, and subsequent restrictions on social distancing etc. The FSA worked with Local Authorities across England, Wales and Northern Ireland during 2022/23 to develop recovery plans for food safety services, setting priorities for service recovery at that time.
3.11	Belfast City Council's Food Safety team successfully achieved the key service recovery milestones and objectives in 2022/23 and 2023/24, these were designed to focus interventions on the highest risk businesses, bringing these back into the routine inspection programme. In 2025/26, further significant progress has been made towards returning to normal inspection frequencies for the vast majority of businesses across the range of high, moderate and low risk categories. Whilst a small backlog of inspections remains, Officers are working to eliminate this over the 2026/27 year.
3.12	The Food Standards Agency introduced a modernised Food Standards delivery model in 2024/25. This has resulted in changes to the risk scoring matrix for such inspections to take account of allergen compliance, and results in some businesses being categorised in higher risk categories and requiring more frequent inspections. This has inadvertently created a backlog of inspections and officers are working to eliminate this in 2026/2027. Officers will continue to assess the impact of these changes going forward.
3.13	Reforms to the food hygiene delivery model are currently being developed by the FSA and they anticipate that pilots for the new model will commence in 2027.

	Financial & Resource Implications
3.14	The Food Standards Agency provides some grant funding to help support these services on an annual basis to all District Councils in NI. This funding is allocated based on population size of each District as well as the profile of food businesses located within each area. In 2026/27 the funding allocated to Belfast City Council is approximately £343,817. Additional funding is provided by DAERA and FSA for delivery of the imported food function at Belfast Port.
3.15	The remaining resources required for this core service are included within the City and Neighbourhood Services existing budgets and no additional resources are anticipated.
	Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessments
3.16	None
4.0	**Appendices - Documents Attached**
4.1	Appendix 1 – Food Service Delivery Plan 2026-2027

APPENDIX 1

BELFAST CITY COUNCIL
CITY & NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES DEPARTMENT
SERVICE PLAN FOR FOOD LAW ENFORCEMENT 2026 - 2027

This service plan for food law enforcement describes the techniques and approaches to be taken by Belfast City Council during 2026 – 2027 to ensure food is safe and food is what it says it is. The Council will mix and balance the four common approaches to enforcement:

- Demand driven
- Education driven
- Inspection driven
- Intelligence driven

Food safety is a priority for the Council's regulatory service, with staff in Food Safety, Port Health and Business Support providing the majority of the service.

1 – Service Aims and Objectives

1.1 Aims and objectives

The key aims and objectives of the food service are to:

1. Protect consumers and ensure food produced, imported through or sold in Belfast is safe to eat and meets the necessary legal standards
2. Support the local economy, including the regeneration and investment in the City Centre by minimising the cost of food related illness and supporting individual businesses through clear advice, guidance and good regulation which are effective, risk based and proportionate.
3. Respond to all complaints or service requests within target response times and meet the needs of local people through effective delivery of quality and customer centric services.
4. Help consumers and businesses understand about safe food and help to ensure that consumers have the information they need to make informed choices.

1.2 Links to corporate objectives and plans

The Belfast Agenda 2024 sets out the vision for Belfast to become a city which will drive a successful economy, a magnet for investment and a great place to live for everyone. It reflects the priorities of community planning partners and the public.

The Food Safety Service has an important contribution to make to the achievement of the city's priorities, particularly by supporting the economy and creating a safe city. The service also helps the Council in its efforts to stimulate the local economy, supporting other key strategies including the Bolder Vision for Belfast which aims to create a more attractive, accessible, safe and vibrant city.

In promoting food safety, the Food Safety Service also contributes to delivering the cross-government Food Strategy, published in June 2022, setting out a joint vision for the UK food system in 2030 and the Food Standards Agency's Strategy for 2022-2027.

The Service, by improving food safety in the city, plays an important role in promoting Belfast to visitors and tourists.

2. Background

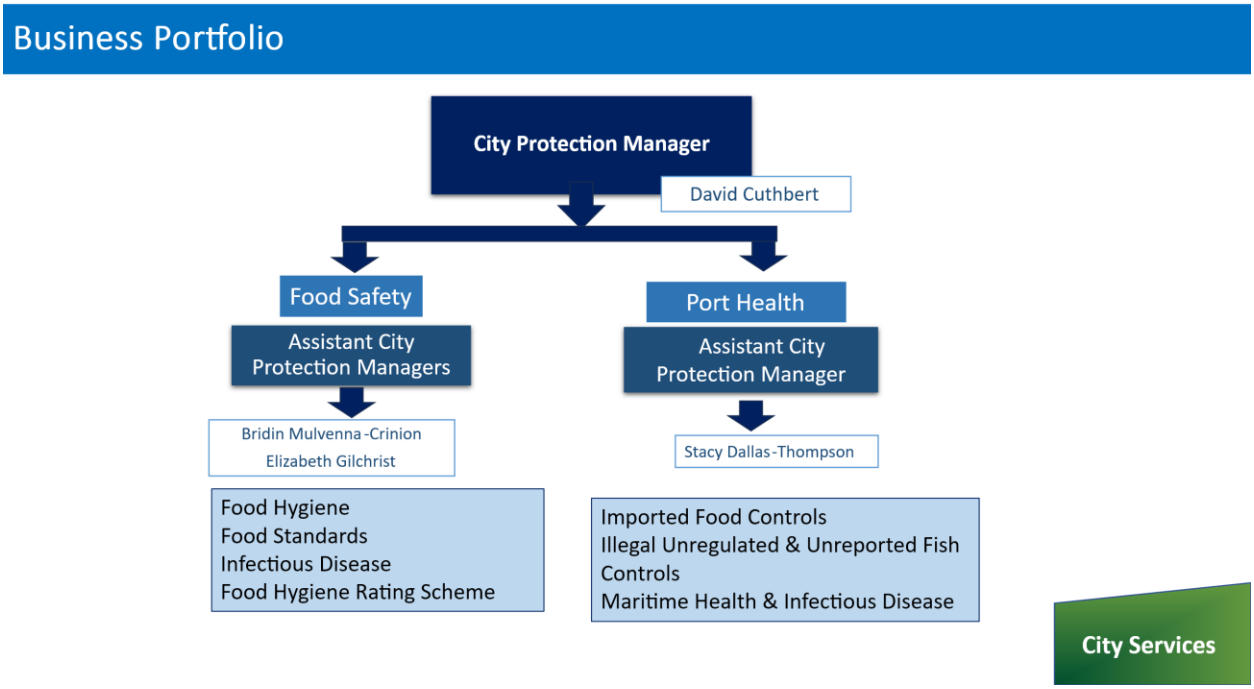
2.1 Profile of the Local Authority

The Council is the largest of the 11 Councils in Northern Ireland with almost 3000 employees. The Council has 60 Councillors over 10 election wards. It serves a population of 348,000 (with a daytime population of over 400,000). The area is predominantly urban in nature with the Council offices being located in the city centre. The city is the major centre for both employment and entertainment with two thirds of the population of Northern Ireland being within 50 km of the city.

Within the city boundary is the Port of Belfast, a significant port within the United Kingdom. Around two thirds of Northern Ireland's seaborne trade, and a quarter of that for Ireland as a whole, is handled at the port.

2.2 Organisational Structure

City Services



2.2.1 Appointed laboratories for analysis

The Northern Ireland Public Health Laboratory based at Belfast City Hospital, provides specialist services in food microbiology and pathology. The Council has appointed Eurofins Food Testing Ireland Ltd as Public Analysts to provide specialist analysis and advice on food composition, labelling and chemical and physical contaminants of food. Identification of pests associated with food and food premises is sourced on demand.

2.3 Scope of the Food Service

Belfast City Council carries out all functions relating to food safety and food standards matters, including the following:

- Registration and approval of food premises
- Inspection of food premises including manufacturing, catering and retail premises in accordance with a range of legislation and guidance, and taking into consideration the Council's Regulation and Enforcement Policy
- Implementation of the national Food Hygiene Rating Scheme including publication of food hygiene inspection results on the national website
- Dealing with potential food hazards including food alerts
- Inspection of foodstuffs and the formulation and implementation of sampling programmes for analysis in relation to composition and labelling and/or microbiological examination.

- Investigation of complaints relating to food and hygiene of food premises and investigation of cases of suspected food poisoning
- Providing advice and information on food safety matters
- The provision of specialist food safety education programmes, and signposting to other commercially available training services
- Food safety promotional activities
- Provision of practical food safety and port health training to environmental health students
- Investigation of incidents of statutorily notifiable food and water related illnesses on behalf of the Director of Public Health of the Public Health Agency
- Inspection of third country (non-EU) imported food of non-animal origin
- In partnership with the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs the operation of the Port of Belfast Border Inspection Post and the inspection of Products of Animal Origin.
- Enhanced screening of Maritime Declaration of Health documents for all vessels arriving in Belfast.
- Inspection of vessels (ships – including passenger ferries) arriving at the Port to ensure compliance with International and United Kingdom health and hygiene requirements including food safety and control of infectious diseases and to issue Ship Sanitation Certificates as required.
- Enforcement of legislation relating to import control of Organic products
- Enforcement of legislation to control illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing in order to ensure food safety and protect marine ecosystems
- The issuing of attestations and export health certificates required for the export of consignments of non-animal foods and fish from NI to third countries

The service is currently provided by members of staff employed by Belfast City Council. All staff involved in the inspection of food and food premises meet the qualification and competency requirements of the Food Law Code of Practice and the FSA competency framework.

2.4 Demands on the Food Service

2.4.1. Food Safety Service

Belfast City Council has 3557 food businesses within the city.

A profile of premises classified in accordance with the FSA monitoring returns are given below.

TYPE OF ESTABLISHMENT	NO. OF PREMISES
Primary Producers	16
Manufacturers & Packers	149
Importers/Exporters	41 (including shipping agents)
Distributors/Transporters	82
Retailers	732
Restaurant/Caterers	2537

11 manufacturing premises and 8 cold stores in the city are approved under EC Reg 853/2004.

The majority of food premises in the city are caterers or retailers reflecting the fact that Belfast is a major regional centre for shopping, entertainment, business and tourism. However, within the City there are a number of major manufacturers including 2 multi-national bakeries, 2 flour mills, 8 cold stores, 5 meat preparations and other meat products premises, an animal fat rendering plant, and 5 fish processors approved under EC Regulations which manufacture and process food for distribution throughout Northern Ireland and Great Britain and export to the Republic of Ireland.

An External Temporary Storage Facility (ETSF formerly known as Enhanced Remote Transit Shed – ERTS) is a warehouse designated by HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC), where goods are temporarily stored pending clearance by HMRC, and prior to release into free circulation. ETSFs are periodically examined to ascertain if foods are stored.

There are a large number of distribution centres located in the city many of which distribute across Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Eleven of these premises specialise in ethnic foods of non-EU origin and are monitored to ensure imported food controls are being adhered to.

It is estimated that over 5% of Belfast's food businesses, across a range of business types, are owned by people whose first language is not English. Whilst this adds significantly to diversity and customer choice, it requires particular effort from the service to ensure equal access to advice and information, including the facility for the translation of documents and provision of interpreters for on-site visits and meetings.

The Council's food safety services are delivered from the Cecil Ward Building, 4-10 Linenhall Street, Belfast, usually between the hours of 0830 and 1700, Monday to Thursday, and between 0830 and 1630 on Fridays. The Port Health services are delivered from the Port Health Unit at 21 Dargan Drive, BT3 9JG, delivering the imported food control service on a 24 hour, 7 days a week basis.

Out of hours work is undertaken as necessary, such as for businesses that only open late at night and/or at weekends and for additional Port health work such as ship inspections.

An Environmental Health Officer is on standby outside normal office hours, to deal with urgent notifications from the FSA and also infectious disease incidents at the discretion of the Public Health Agency (PHA). A Port Health Officer is on standby out of office hours to deal with issues arising in the Port. This service extends 24 hours per day for 365 days per year.

Historically there has been a continued increase in the number of large outdoor events which have significant catering facilities associated with them, such as farmers' and continental markets, festivals and concerts. These events sometimes require evening, weekend and Bank Holiday visits to monitor food hygiene standards. We will continue to strengthen relationships with promoters and organisers this year in order to ensure that adequate attention is given to planning for food safety. Significant events this year include the Fleadh Cheoil Na hÉireann, Christmas Continental Market, St Patricks Day, Feile, Orangefest, Mela, Belsonic and Vital music festivals, among others. The Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann is estimated to bring approximately 800,000 visitors to Belfast over a nine-day period with significant food safety resources required in relation to preparation and planning, as well as site visits throughout the event and responding to any food safety complaints or incidents as they arise. There will be

several dedicated food court areas as well as increased mobile licensed street trading within city centre and potential for pop-up food stalls.

2.4.2. Port Health Service

The Port Health service operates a 24-hour service to deliver the additional responsibilities resulting from the UK's exit from the EU for imported food checks on some foods arriving from UK. Windsor Framework arrangements agreed by the UK Government commenced from 1st October 2023, and the Council is working alongside our partners in DAERA, DEFRA and FSA to apply the relevant statutory requirements. In May 2025, the UK and EU Governments announced their intention to negotiate a Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) agreement. Once agreed, this may reduce the need for some checks, however in the meantime, the UK and EU have committed to full implementation of the existing arrangements.

The Port Health team comprises 4 shift-based teams who operate a 24/7 service, in addition to a small team of 4 daytime officers deliver imported food controls for goods arriving from other 3rd countries, ship sanitation inspections, infectious disease duties, public health nuisances and some food hygiene work within the Port.

It is intended that a further review of the Port Health function will be undertaken once the operating and funding models for delivery of Windsor Framework obligations and any future SPS agreement are clarified and progressed in the coming years. An appropriate and sustainable longer term service model, including sustainable financing arrangements is required and we continue to advocate for this with key partners, including FSA, DAERA and DEFRA.

Belfast City Council's Port Health operations relocated to a newly constructed purpose-built Inspection Facility at 21 Dargan Drive in August 2025. This site is managed and maintained by the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA). These facilities have been approved by the Food Standards Agency on behalf of the European Union as a Designated Point of Entry into the EU for the carrying out of official controls on high–risk products of non-animal origin imported from outside the EU. The facility is also approved for the examination, sampling and clearance of third country imports of products of animal origin and for inspection of certain food contact materials.

2.5 Enforcement Policy

The Council has prepared a Regulation and Enforcement Policy which was formally adopted by the Council in December 2011. The purpose of this policy is to secure an efficient and effective approach to all regulatory and enforcement activities carried out by Belfast City Council. The policy is consistent with the principles set out in the Government's Better Regulation Agenda and with the principles of the Enforcement Concordat and it is also intended to improve compliance with legislation while minimising the burden on businesses, individuals, organisations and the Council. The policy sets out the principles which will enable the Service to ensure consistent and open enforcement and is considered when determining appropriate enforcement action. Management controls are in place to ensure that all decisions on enforcement are consistent with this policy.

In preparing the Policy, the Council has considered the Regulator's Compliance Code and the "Statement of Intent" between the Local Better Regulation Office, the Department of Enterprise Trade and Investment, and District Councils.

The Regulation and Enforcement Policy is available on the Council's website and can be accessed at www.belfastcity.gov.uk. Businesses are advised of the existence of the policy together with how it can be obtained on all standard letters and reports left following the inspection of premises.

3. Service Delivery

3.1 Food Premises Interventions

The Council plans and delivers a risk-based Food Premises Intervention Programme based on the requirements of the Food Law Code of Practice. The frequency and type of intervention planned aims to concentrate resources on the worst offenders and higher risk businesses whilst at the same time reducing the burden on the better businesses.

There are 1500 premises due a food hygiene intervention plus a backlog of 158 from previous years. At the start of April 2026 there were 606 premises due a food standards intervention plus a backlog of 397 from 2025-2026. The significant increase in standard inspections due in this financial year is due to the move to a new Food Standards delivery model.

3.2 Food Hygiene Intervention Strategy

As per the Food Law Code of Practice the following premises have been prioritised for inspection in 2026-2027:

Risk category	Inspection planned
A	6
B	133
C	480
D	482
E	389
Unrated at 1st April 2025	10
Backlog	158

3.3 Food Standards Intervention Strategy

As per the Food law code of practice the following premises have been prioritised for inspection at the start of April 2026 in 2026-2027:

Total FSDM interventions due 2026-2027 including backlog:

Risk Category	Inspection planned
PI1	1
PI2	9
PI3	6
MR1	42
MR2	267
MR3	238
LR1	36

LR2	9
LR3	1

3.4 Alternative Enforcement Strategy (AES)

Normally those food businesses which present the lowest risk to public health will be subject to an alternative approach to inspection. This AES consists of a Food Safety Hygiene and Standards Self-Assessment Questionnaire which is posted out to the businesses along with tailored advice and information. Completed questionnaires are reviewed to monitor compliance and confirm that there have been no significant changes to the business or a change in ownership. Premises that do not provide the necessary information or indicate a significant change to their activities may be subject to an inspection.

The introduction of FSDM has reduced the number of premises eligible for food standards AES.

3.5 Revisits

In line with the statutory Food Law Code of Practice all food businesses that fail to comply with significant statutory requirements shall be subject to appropriate enforcement action and revisit to verify compliance. As a minimum they will receive a written warning letter. It is anticipated that approximately 300 revisits following food hygiene inspections shall be completed and approximately 150 revisits following food standards inspections.

3.6 Revisits for FHRS rerating

Under the requirements of the Food Hygiene Rating Act (NI) 2016 additional revisits will be carried out on request to ‘re-rate’ an establishment, subject to criteria being met and a fee of £150 being paid. Approximately 80 rerating inspections are anticipated for 2026-2027.

3.7 Food Complaints

The Council will investigate food complaints received from members of the public or food businesses in line with the service’s response times for urgent and non-urgent service requests. In determining the appropriate course of action, the Council will take into consideration any reports received from the Home, Originating or Primary Authorities and the food business identified as the cause of the complaint and will have regard to the Council’s Regulatory and Enforcement Policy. For 2026/27 the Council estimates that it will receive approximately 590 complaints relating to food or the hygiene of food premises.

3.8 Home Authority Principle and Primary Authority Scheme

The Home Authority Principle and Primary Authority Scheme is not a legal requirement in NI. We will however take cognisance of any relevant advice given by the Home or Primary Authority.

While the Council does not enter into formal written home authority partnerships with any business, it has established a close liaison with the majority of businesses, including the Education Authority, for whom it informally acts as a Home Authority on behalf of the other 10 District Councils. Our remit extends to providing advice, guidance and the follow up of non-compliances in relation to policy or procedures identified by our own officers or by officers from

the other District Councils. Advice is also provided during programmed inspections and other visits.

On request the Council will investigate all matters referred to it by other local authorities and where appropriate will provide a written response to requests for information. For 2026/2027 the Council estimates that it will receive over 250 requests for information from other Local Authorities.

The Council liaise closely with the Department of Agriculture Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) and carry out work on their behalf under a number of MOU's and SLA's. This includes work relating to egg, beef and poultry meat labelling and traceability and the issuing of export health certificates and attestations for trade to non-EC countries.

3.9 Advice to Business

The Council is committed to the improvement of standards in food businesses and advice to businesses is an important dimension of that strategy. Advice is given through site-visits, provision of compliance tools such as the Butchers' HACCP Pack, and the Safe Catering (HACCP) Pack, the Council's website, dealing with enquiries and requests for advice, through correspondence, meetings with trade groups, distribution of printed materials, and educational and online training programmes. The service will continue to support all businesses with the implementation and maintenance of Food Safety Management Systems based on HACCP principles, in conjunction with a graduated approach to enforcement.

In order to promote a positive image and promote the reputation of the Council the unit publishes articles in City matters and interlink.

It is estimated that 500 new businesses will receive advice in the year.

Our system of recording service requests, response times and actions help plan, improve and monitor this part of the service. It is estimated that in addition to complaints relating to food or premises a further 1250 requests for service will be received this year.

The Port Health Service is an active member of the local shipping community, having extensive business contacts with the Maritime Coastguard Agency, Belfast Harbour Commissioners, N.I. importers, customs, clearance agents, hauliers, shipping companies, ferry operators and stevedores. Advice is given on Port Health related matters, including food safety, to the shipping community on a regular basis and when requested help and advice is given to local importers and members of the general public on the importation of third country foodstuffs including products of animal origin. The Port Health service has also engaged together with DAERA, FSA and other Councils with trade and businesses to provide advice and assistance in relation to additional requirements following Brexit, and the service continues to receive requests for information and advice in this regard.

3.10 Food Sampling

The Food Safety Unit has prepared a Food Sampling Policy outlining its general approach to chemical and microbiological sampling as well its approach in specific situations. This approach recognises the important role of sampling in protecting public health and product quality, detecting fraudulent activities and unhygienic practices and to ensure that food standards are maintained.

Food sampling programmes are produced annually for both chemical and microbiological samples, after consultation with the Public Analyst and the Food Examiner. The programme has regard to national, regional and local co-ordinated sampling surveys.

Several areas of intelligence are used to identify priority sampling and premises. Such intelligence may include Incident reports sent to FSA, Food Alerts, FSA Annual Incident report, RASFFs, Food standards complaints; UK Food Surveillance System annual reports, FSA Imported Food Annual Reports & Food Fraud Database bulletins.

In 2026/2027 we aim to sample 300 for chemical analysis and 1000 products for microbiological examination.

3.11 Port Health – Imported food inspections and sampling

The Unit receives approximately 25 manifests for containerised shipping cargoes per month and also up to 77 manifests from roll on-roll off ferry sailing arrivals at Belfast Port each week. From these manifests Council officers identify vessels and their cargoes. Cargo manifests are scrutinised, and all third country imported foodstuffs are identified to ensure compliance with import processes and food safety legislation.

Documentary, identity and physical checks, including sampling, are carried out on all third country products of animal origin in accordance with the EC veterinary checks regime. Following introduction of the NI Protocol and Windsor Framework, this has extended to relevant food products arriving from GB (red lane).

EU legislation requires that specified import conditions will apply to certain imported consignments of third country products of non-animal origin. These products all require a documentary check, and a proportion will be subject to identity and physical checks (including sampling) at a level laid down in the legislation. Products not subject to the specific legislation will be risk assessed and appropriate checks, including sampling, carried out to ensure compliance with relevant imported food legislation. When possible, the Unit carries out imported food sampling programmes devised by the Food Standards Agency or the E.U.

A sampling plan for this year is based on trade volumes and commodities. Samples taken will include mandatory samples required by imported food legislation as well as surveillance samples guided by the UK's National Monitoring Plan. We anticipate the numbers of samples to be taken from imported food consignments in 2026/2027 to be in the region of:

- Microbiological 45
- Chemical 250

The International Health Regulations (2005) require that all ships must be inspected at an authorised port such as Belfast and where necessary a Ship Sanitation Certificate issued for the prevention and control of public health risks. The unit also responds to Ship Sanitation inspection requests from ships that operate out of Larne Port. Certificates are valid for a period of 6 months. As the number of inspections are dependent upon requests from Ships Agents, the volume of inspections vary each year. In 2025/2026 we carried out 70 ship sanitation inspections, which is a decrease from the previous year in which 103 ship sanitation inspections were completed.

Food hygiene and food standards inspections of Passenger Ferries registered with and operating out of Belfast are undertaken. Some of these ferries are large food businesses producing up to 7500 meals per day. We will inspect between 2 and 4 ferries in 2026-2027.

The unit also regularly inspect External Temporary Storage Facilities (formerly known as ERTS), fishing vessels operating out of Belfast and other vessels in dry dock for repair. Food Hygiene and Standards inspections are also carried out at George Best City Airport as well as ensuring the safety of water delivered to aircraft.

3.12 Control and Investigation of Outbreaks and Food Related and other Infectious Disease

The Council will attempt to investigate all notifications of infectious disease received from the Public Health Agency (PHA), within one working day of receipt. Specifically trained and competent environmental health officers within the Food Safety and Port Health Unit are authorised by the PHA for the investigation of notifications.

Investigation of outbreaks of food related infectious disease is conducted in liaison with the Consultant in Public Health Medicine of the PHA, and in accordance with the existing Outbreak Control Plans and protocols.

The Council estimates that it will receive 150 notifications of food related infectious disease during the year, with an additional 100 alleged food poisoning complaints from the public.

The Port Health Division will respond immediately it is notified of any complaint or incident of food poisoning or food related infectious disease occurring on board a ship or premises within the Port of Belfast or relating to a passenger using Belfast City Airport.

3.13 Food Safety Incidents

The FSA receives and issues information about foods within the supply chain which have been found to be unsafe or do not meet legal requirements. These include notifications about Product Withdrawals, Product Recalls and Allergy Alerts. Where necessary, the FSA will issue direction to councils to take specific action to protect consumers.

All notifications that require action are recorded on our database with details of the actions taken recorded against the relevant premises.

The Council estimates that it will receive 150 notifications from the FSA during the year that will require investigation and further action to protect public safety.

3.14 Rapid Alert System for Feed and Food (RASFF).

With EU Exit, the UK has lost access to certain EU information systems including full access to the RASFF. As a result, the Food Standards Agency has developed the Risk Likelihood Dashboard to create a platform to enable more efficient and effective collation and sharing of relevant data for stakeholders involved in protecting public health in relation to imported food and feed. The Risk Likelihood Dashboard provides intelligence from consolidated data sources including historic TRACES data, RASFF Portal, refusals from other 3rd countries. Local Authorities can still create RASFF notifications but have view only of RASFF notifications.

Belfast City Council have access to the Risk Likelihood Dashboard and use it routinely to identify potential risks with imported foods and target surveillance accordingly.

If a consignment/product is to be rejected or destroyed due to a direct or indirect risk to human health, an incident report and rapid alert notification must be completed and forwarded to the FSA Food Incident Branch after consultation with FSA Northern Ireland for onward notification to the European Commission. It is likely that 5-10 notifications will be generated in 2026/2027.

3.15 Liaisons with Other Organisations

The Food Safety and Port Health Unit has extensive liaison in place with a wide range of other organisations:

- Food Standards Agency NI (FSANI) through enforcement stakeholder meetings, the Northern Ireland Food Managers Groups (NIFMG), and numerous other formal and informal meetings.
- The Public Health Agency (MOU exists) in relation to the investigation of sporadic cases and outbreaks of food related infectious disease.
- NIFMG reporting to Environmental Health NI
- National Food Hygiene Focus Group (UK)
- Association of Port Health Authorities. The Senior Environmental Health Officer (Port Health) is a member Port Health Liaison Network.
- The Department of Agriculture Environment and Rural Affairs in relation to the operation of the Border Inspection Post.
- Merchant Navy Welfare Board (NI)
- HM Customs and Excise nationally and locally in relation to imported food controls.
- Planning Service to review related applications.
- Department for Infrastructure Water Quality Liaison Group.
- Safe Food through projects and working groups on the Island of Ireland
- The Northern Ireland Area Medical Advisory Committee - Infectious Disease Sub-Group.
- Belfast Resilience-Harbour Working Group
- Maritime Coastguard Agency
- Belfast Harbour Commissioners
- The Education Authority for NI School Meals Service
- NI Takeaway association

Close liaison is maintained with the Council's Building Control Service, Pest Control and Waste Management Service, as well as with the other regulatory units.

3.16 Promotion of Food Safety

The Council carries out educational and promotional activities as an integral part of its food safety duties. In addition to this, specialist promotional activities are carried by the Food Safety Unit.

Educational and promotional activities planned for 2026/2027 include the following:

Promotional Activity
Maintain and promote and manage the Food Hygiene Rating scheme
Provide an Imported Food/Port Health training day for UU students
Provide training for year 3 and 4 UU students on Food Safety

Promote Environmental Health Placement with year 2 UU students
To publish at least one article in City Matters
To develop relevant advice / information for businesses to assist them to comply with enforcement / legislative requirements
Promote EH as a profession within local schools
Participate and assist with Safefood food hygiene training
Promote and assist with FSA food safety campaigns

4.0 Resources

4.1 Financial allocation

Details of the budget for the delivery of the Council's food service in 2026-2027 are within the City and Neighbourhood Service's revenue estimates and were approved by Council in February 2026.

4.2 Staffing allocation

4.2.1 Food Safety and Port Health Unit

The full staffing compliment in the Food Safety & Port Health Unit has the equivalent of 19 full-time staff engaged in food safety work. All officers hold specific qualifications and are assessed for competencies as required by the Code of Practice and are authorised for duties in accordance with the Council's documented procedure. (See table below).

Position	Hours (Full or Part Time)	Authorisation	FTE
Food Safety			
City Protection Manager	FT	None	0.1
Assistant City Protection Manager	FT	Full including Approvals	0.7
Assistant City Protection Manager	FT	Full including Approvals	0.7
Senior EHO	PT	Full including Approvals	0.8
Senior EHO	PT	Full including Approvals	0.8
Senior EHO	FT	Full including Approvals	1
Senior EHO	FT	Full including Approvals	1
Senior EHO	FT	Full including Approvals	1
EHO	FT	Full including Coldstore Approvals	1.0
EHO	FT	Full	1.0
EHO	FT	Full	1.0
EHO	FT	Full	1.0
EHO	FT	Full	1.0
EHO	FT	Partial	1.0
EHO	PT	Full	0.5
EHO	FT	Partial	1.0
EHO	FT	Partial	1.0
Technical Officer	PT	Full	0.8
Technical Officer	FT	Full	1.0
Technical Officer	FT	Full	1.0

Technical Officer	FT	Full	1.0
Senior EHO	1	Vacant (seconded to Port Health)	1
		Total FTE	19.4
		Total Allocated FTE hours**	28091.20
		Total Occupied FTE	28091.20

**FTE = 200 working days @ 7.24 hr per working day = 1448 hours per FTE

Port Health/Imported food			
City Protection Manager	FT	None	0.1
Assistant City Protection Manager PORT (daytime)	FT	Full with Approvals inc Port Health	0.7
Senior EHO PORT (daytime)	FT	Full inc Port Health	0.7
Senior EHO PORT (daytime)	FT	Full inc Port Health	1.0
EHO PORT (daytime)	FT	Full with approvals inc Port Health	1.0
Team Leader EHOs x4 (shift based)	FT	Port health	4.0
EHOs x10 (shift based)	FT	Port Health – 1 post vacant	10.0
Technical Support Officer x8 (shift based)	FT	Full compliment	8.0
Port Health Support Assistants (shift based)	FT	Full compliment	8.0

Current short-term vacancies that cannot be covered by temporary contracts are on occasion covered by agency staff.

The Port Health shift-based staff (including Team Leader Environmental Health Officers, Environmental Health Officers, Technical Support Officers and Port Health Support Assistants) are employed on a temporary basis for Port Health to carry out required official controls on goods from GB following temporary funding from FSA.

*Full Authorisation: authorised by Belfast City Council to enforce the provisions of The Food Safety Order (Northern Ireland) 1991 and any Orders or Regulations made thereunder or relating to the foregoing or having effect by virtue of the European Communities Act 1972.

4.2.1a Estimate of Resource (Time) Requirements

Food Hygiene/Food Standards

Activity	**No Tasks**	**Time/task**	**Total Hours**
Cat A inspections Hygiene	6	5.5	33
Cat B inspections Hygiene	133	5	665
Cat C inspections Hygiene including backlog	482	4	1928
Cat D inspections Hygiene including backlog	636	4	2544

Cat E inspections Hygiene including backlog	301	1.5	451.50
AES Category E Hygiene	100	0.5	50
Unrated and unplanned events (Hygiene)	500	5	2500
PI1 1 month	1	5	5
PI2 3 months	9	5	45
PI3 6 months	6	5	30
MR1 12 months	42	4	168
MR2 24 months	267	4	1068
MR3 36 months	238	2.5	595
LR1 48 months	36	2	72
LR2 60 months	9	1	9
LR3 72 months	1	0.5	0.5
Backlog Standards	397	1	397
Unrated and unplanned events (Standards)	500	5	2500
Revisits	320	1	320
Advisory and other visits	75	1	75
Micro sampling	1000	1	1000
Chemical sampling	300	2	600
Food Complaints	590	7	4130
ID investigations	150	2.5	300
Food Alerts For action	100	2	200
Prosecutions	3	74	222
Other Service Requests	800	7	5600
Staff Development	19	30	570
Working groups and initiatives with other external partners and stakeholders including NIFMG and Sub-Groups, FSA, APHA	-	-	200
Management of service and staff	-	-	2,500
Staff meetings	-	-	240
Projects e.g., web development, procedures, campaigns	-	-	50
Mandatory Food Hygiene Rating Scheme	-	-	30
		Total activity hours	29098

There are 28091.20 FTE Hours allocated to the service. The anticipated activity hours are 29098 are not inclusive of the additional time and resources required to service the Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann event in Summer of 2026. This identifies that even if the total allocated FTE was available, the service demands are anticipated to exceed the available FTE resources at the Council's disposal. A key driver of the demand on the service has arisen from significant impacts of changes to inspection frequencies of the food standards delivery model – increasing

the numbers of food standards inspections due. The Food Safety service will therefore need to continue to prioritise its activities to maximise the most efficient and effective use of the available resource in service delivery while addressing the areas of greatest risk. It should also be noted that in-year changes to risk ratings may result in multiple inspections for same premises in one year. Such changes are not always possible to predict.

Port Health

Activity	No Tasks	Time/task	Total Hours
Inspect all shipping and ferry Manifests	4300	0.5	2150
To screen Maritime Declaration of health documentation to monitor compliance with International Health Regulations and infectious disease	2000	0.5	1000
To inspect vessels for the issue of Ship Sanitation Certificates.	140	6.00	840
Documentary & phys. checks, including sampling, of foodstuffs imported from outside EU.	* (Estimated 40,000)	* (varies depending on task)	

*This estimate reflects documentary, identity and physical checks on products of animal origin (fish and fish products), high risk food not of animal origin, plastic kitchenware, organic products and IUU Catch Certificates undertaken in 2025/26 and is likely to be subject to further development and resource planning in 2026/27 as statutory requirements, systems and processes are further developed/updated, and businesses adjust to the new arrangements. The duration of tasks and degree of officer time varies according to commodity types and is under regular review with partners including FSA and DAERA as part of the annual resource allocation arrangements that are currently in place.

4.3 Staff Development Plan

The development needs of the Food Safety and Port Health Unit are identified as part of the Council's business planning process, competency assessment and through personal development planning. Relevant local training is identified by the Northern Ireland Food Managers Group and subgroups, the Food Standards Agency Northern Ireland and the Public Health Agency. Training needs are also reviewed during the year to take into account staff changes and other issues identified. In-house briefing sessions are delivered regularly as part of monthly Unit meetings.

Competency requirements required by the Food Law Code of Practice are reassessed for all Officers annually and all deficiencies addressed in year.

Food Safety Training Plan 2026-2027

The priority training areas agreed between NIFMG and FSA and shall be provided as low-cost training. The key areas have been identified as follows:

- FHRS National Consistency Exercise
- Food Standards Delivery Model Consistency Exercise
- Food Safety Conference
- North/South Food Safety Conference
- Shelf Life and Microbiology
- Enforcement /Notices/RAN's
- Basic HACCP for new officers
- General Microbiology
- Cold Press Juices
- Sushi
- Root Cause Analysis
- Food Crime Intelligence

There is also access to online courses provided by the FSA, Safefood, as well as refresher training via ABC Food Law. Port Health staff also avail of training on imported food controls via the Better Training for Safer Food programme.

5.0 Quality Assessment

The following arrangements are in place to ensure the quality of services provided by the Food Safety and Port Health Unit:

5.1 Internal Monitoring Arrangements

The Food Safety and Port Health Units have documented monitoring procedures. These procedures are implemented by experienced officers for quality control and assurance. Current procedures include:

• Regular individual meetings with lead officers
• Use of procedure notes
• Use of standardised inspection report forms, letters and phrases
• Review of post-inspection paperwork
• Monitoring of inspections, visits and actions by documentation checks and accompanied visits
• Post complaint investigation monitoring
• Approved premises file review and monitoring
• Internal auditing of adherence to procedures
• Monthly meetings of the Food Safety Teams
• Seminars / exercises and training as required

5.2 External monitoring and verification

The Border Inspection Post is audited annually by DAERA, and the food service is periodically subject to both FSA and EU audits.

The inland food safety team are subject to audit internally and externally.

6.0 Review

6.1 Review against the Service Plan

Performance against the unit's business plan is reviewed monthly and quarterly by the Unit Management Team. Summary performance information on the previous years' service plan will be reported with each Food Service Delivery Plan. The report shall also identify any variance together with areas of improvement.

Performance report on Food Service Delivery Plan for 2025-2026

1. Departmental Plan Targets

Performance Indicator	Target 2025-2026	Achieved 2025-2026
% Premises deemed broadly compliant	95%	86% Continuing higher levels of poor hygiene standards with impact of economic downturn & higher costs affecting broad compliance

2. Other relevant performance Information update for 25/26

Performance Indicator	Target 2025/26	Achieved % 2025/26	Explanation of variance and improvements for 2025/26
% Of the food hygiene programme complete	100%	89%	Priority inspections due in 2025/26 were completed, and significant progress made in addressing backlog from the Covid pandemic.
Backlog of previous hygiene interventions	100%	96%	Fewer inspections overdue at end of 2526.
% of the food standards programme complete	100%	66%	Continuing to prioritise higher risk standards inspections and focus on reducing hygiene backlog.
% Of food complaints resolved within 8 weeks	75%	96%	Target exceeded
Micro Samples Taken	1000	98% (980 samples)	Year on Year increase since Covid Pandemic; using available resources
Chemical Samples Taken	300	82% (246 samples)	Year on Year increase since Covid Pandemic; using available resources with reduced samples taken in first quarter due to resources dedicated to implementation of Food Standards Delivery Model
% Of urgent food complaints responded to within target (1 working day)	100%	94%	slight decrease due to additional pressures on service

To investigate notifications of gastrointestinal illness within 24 hours and report to PHA within 24 hours.	90% returned within target 90% contacted within target	100% 100%	Exceeded Target Exceeded Target
% Of manifests examined for imported food stuffs	100%	100%	Target Met
Number of imported food consignments examined	This target was reported in the Food Service Delivery Plan in previous years, however volumes since 2021/22 have fluctuated significantly with patterns in trade volumes continuously changing We continue to work with FSA and partners to identify suitable targets as systems and processes, and trade volumes become established.		

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PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

Belfast City Council

Subject:	Public Consultation on Proposed Animal Welfare Policy Reforms in Northern Ireland
Date:	9 June 2026
Reporting Officer:	David Bone, City Services Manager
Contact Officer:	Helen Morrissey, City Protection Manager

Restricted Reports

Is this report restricted? **Yes** [ ] **No** [x]

Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.

Insert number [ ]

1. Information relating to any individual
2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual
3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information)
4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter
5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained
6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction
7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime

If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?

After Committee Decision	[ ]
After Council Decision	[ ]
Sometime in the future	[ ]
Never	[ ]

Call-in

Is the decision eligible for Call-in? **Yes** [x] **No** [ ]

1.0	**Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues**
1.1	To make Members aware that The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) has launched a public consultation on proposed Animal Welfare Policy Reforms in Northern Ireland. The consultation was launched on 5 May 2026 and closes on Tuesday 30 June 2026.
1.2	The consultation seeks views on proposed changes across four key policy areas: • the regulation of rescue and rehoming organisations; • an inflationary increase in dog licence fees; • a ban on specific aversive training devices; and • strengthened microchipping requirements for dogs.
1.3	In addition, the consultation includes a call for evidence on the mandatory microchipping of pet cats.
1.4	<u>The Proposals</u> The consultation proposes local councils will be the enforcement and regulatory body for licensing of rescue and rehoming organisations. Officers note that this creates a proposed statutory regime for regulation relating to animals which are outside the scope of current statutory duties for Councils e.g. dangerous wild animals, wildlife, farmed animals.
1.5	**1. Regulation of Rescue and Rehoming Organisations** Rescue and rehoming organisations currently operate without formal regulatory oversight. The Department is proposing the introduction of a licensing regime to set uniform welfare standards, enhance transparency and accountability, and strengthen public confidence and protecting animal welfare. This would align with the approach to other animal related businesses and organisations such as animal boarding establishments and pet shops, which are regulated by DAERA
1.6	The proposed measures are intended to be proportionate and ensure compliance with animal welfare standards without introducing excessive bureaucratic burdens. Proposals include: • A requirement for rescue and rehoming organisations to obtain a licence from the council, where more than 5 animals are rehomed within a 12-month period, or where 8 or more animals (or 5 or more dogs) are cared for.

- A requirement for rescue and rehoming organisations to comply with minimum welfare standards or licence conditions, based on the Association of Dogs and Cats Homes (ADCH) standards relating to animal numbers, staffing, environment, diet, enrichment, rehoming, handling, and protection from suffering, injury and disease.
- A requirement for all licensed organisations to be listed in a public register maintained by the council.

1.7 **2. Dog Licence Fees**

At present, anyone who keeps a dog must obtain a licence from the council. Licence fees were last reviewed and updated in 2011, with the current fee £12.50 for a single dog, £32 for a block licence, and £5 for concessionary licences. Those on income related benefits, or who have had their dog neutered, may pay a reduced fee of £5. Over 65s may obtain a free dog licence for their first or only dog.

1.8 The Department proposes an inflationary increase for licence fees to ensure that they remain appropriate, proportionate and reflective of councils' enforcement and administrative resource requirements. The Department anticipate that by raising the fees, councils will be able to direct more resources to deliver the dog control services, benefiting both dog owners and the wider community.

1.9 The proposed fees are £18.50 for a single dog licence, and £47.50 for a block licence. It is proposed that concessionary fees will be retained, with an inflationary increase to £7.50. Over 65s would continue to receive a free licence for their first or only dog.

1.10 **3. Aversive Training Devices**

The Department proposes to ban the use of handheld remote controlled electric shock collars (e-collars), choke collars and prong collars on cats and dogs in Northern Ireland. It is considered that these aversive training devices present the highest risk of deliberate misuse and direct harm to animal welfare.

1.11 The use of electronic containment type fencing, and spray collars was considered as part of the proposal, they were both assessed as presenting lower risk of potential deliberate misuse, and therefore it is proposed that these types of devices would not be banned.

1.12	**4. Strengthening Microchip Requirements for Dogs** The Department proposes to: • Make it an offence for dog owners to not update ownership details on microchip databases, such as a change of address, within a specified time (i.e. 14 days). • Require owners / keepers to declare that they are also the breeder of the dog, to enable database providers to record breeder details where the breeder is also the keeper of the dog. • Require all owners / keepers to microchip their dogs, by eight weeks of age.
1.13	**5. Call for Evidence on microchipping of pet cats** The Department is gathering views, evidence and information on whether microchipping of pet (owned) cats should be considered in Northern Ireland.
1.14	This Call for Evidence is intended to gather information to help assess: • Whether mandatory microchipping of cats would improve animal welfare and responsible ownership; • What benefits such a requirement could deliver; • What risks, barriers, costs or unintended consequences might arise; and • What concerns stakeholders may have, including practical, ethical or enforcement-related issues.
2.0	**Recommendation**
2.1	The Committee is asked to agree the proposed consultation response as attached in **Appendix 8** and to agree to officers forwarding the response to the Department by the closing date of 30 June 2026 and advising it remains draft and subject to full Council ratification and call-in period in August.
3.0	**Main Report**
3.1	<u>Background</u> Members will be aware that councils currently have a statutory responsibility for the enforcement of Welfare of Animals (NI) Act 2011 in respect of non-farmed animals e.g. companion animals and equines (horses and donkeys) and are also responsible for all aspects

	of licensing and enforcement activities under The Dogs (Northern Ireland) Order 1983, including dog breeding establishments.
3.2	**Council have no role in relation to the breeding, sale, licencing, microchipping, ownership or management of cat behaviour. Furthermore, Council have no role in relation to rescue and rehoming organisations, 'doggy day care', pet shops, boarding kennels, including home boarding, all of which are either unregulated or a regulatory function of the Department of Agriculture and Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA).**
3.3	In May 2025 the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) Minister published proposals within an Animal Welfare Pathway (**Appendix 1**) setting out measures to improve animal welfare in Northern Ireland through delivery of a number of policy and legislative reforms, including a review of dog breeding establishments, regulation of rescue and rehoming organisations and prohibition of third-party pet sales.
3.4	Members recently approved a consultation response, in August 2025, in relation to proposed new rules for selling and supplying puppies and kittens.
3.5	Collectively through Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE), Councils continue to raise their concerns of the financial and resource implications of the implementation of new legislation. At the SP&R Committee Meeting on 22 May 2026, Members agreed to write to the Chair of the AERA Committee to highlight on-going concerns in relation to the lack of Animal Welfare funding from DAERA.
3.6	The Northern Ireland Dog Advisory Group (NIDAG) has engaged with the expert advisory group established to review the Dog Breeding Regulations. A copy of their report can be found at **Appendix 2**. This too, will have resourcing implications for councils.
3.7	DAERA is now considering the next phase of proposals and has launched a public consultation on proposed reforms to Animal Welfare policy in Northern Ireland. Councils, via NIDAG have raised their concerns on several occasions that this time period does not adequately allow councils to consider the proposals and have requested the Department extend the deadline by 3 weeks. The Department have not yet agreed to the extension request.
3.8	The consultation seeks views from those with an interest in Animal Welfare, stakeholders who work within the animal welfare sector, individuals or organisations involved in animal rescue and rehoming, and councils which have responsibility for enforcement of companion animal welfare.

3.9	Consultation Full details of the consultation, including all supporting documentation can be found in **Appendices 3 – 7.**
3.10	Officers have drafted a Council response can be found at **Appendix 8.**
3.11	Key comments
3.12	Whilst Officers welcome strategies and policies to improve Animal Welfare, we do not agree that councils should be required to take on new and additional statutory responsibility for the regulation of rescue and rehoming organisations and enforcement of additional offences without the regulatory and financial impacts being fully assessed and consulted upon with councils.
3.13	These proposals would create additional responsibilities for premises and activities which are either un-regulated or currently dealt with by other agencies including DEARA.
3.14	Councils are still dealing with the impact of the legislation on XL bully safeguards and incurring ongoing costs, which are being absorbed by rate payers. The XL bully legislation is still impacting on Dog Warden Service capacity, with other enforcement activities having to be re-prioritised.
3.15	The consultation proposals reflect a concerning and growing trend which concerns officers, whereby central government seeks to devolve enforcement responsibilities to local government without a corresponding transfer of financial resources, powers or legal protections.
3.16	While we understand the Department's difficult budgetary position, the decision to withdraw the annual £1.25M NI funding for Animal Welfare has left councils in a challenging position. In the absence of any commitment of future allocation of funds to councils, the cost of providing our current Animal Welfare Service continues to be borne by the ratepayers.
3.17	Other key points made in the response: Regulation of Rescue and Rehoming Organisations

3.18	Officers appreciate the role of rescue and rehoming organisations play in the rehoming of abandoned, stray and unwanted animals. • Officers are of the view that regulation of the sector aligns much more closely with DAERA's current licensing functions of establishments such as boarding kennels, zoos and pet shops and should sit with them. • As the Regional Lead Authority the Licensing and Enforcement Regime would be best placed with DAERA to ensure a cost-effective delivery model and consistent enforcement across Northern Ireland. This could be implemented within the existing frameworks by authorisation under existing legislation and / or allocation of legislative powers to DAERA. • It is likely there will be unintended consequences for small volunteer-led rescues, leading to risks in a reduction of capacity, closures and the risk of reduced rehoming availability. • Further clarification is needed on animal foster care networks linked to rehoming charities, including definitions of what falls within the scope of the legislation. • We would not be able to deliver the proposed enforcement regime within existing resources.
3.19	<u>Dog Licence Fees</u> • Officers broadly support the proposed fee increases but note the marginal increase in income falls short of full cost recovery. • The proposed inflationary increases provide a modest rise in income and do not meet growing service demands. Dog Warden Services are resource-intensive and demand continues to increase, resulting in costs which have to be absorbed by ratepayers. • In November 2025 NIDAG, having worked in conjunction with Ulster University, provided data to DAERA which demonstrated that an annual dog licence fee in the region of £25 without concessionary discounts, would be considered reasonable, justified and provide full cost recovery to some but not all councils. • Around 70% of dog licences are either free or concessionary (fee of £5.00). Officers recommend the removal of the concessionary licence fee as current administration costs outweigh the licence cost, particularly where documentation / verification checks are required prior to a licence being issued. A greater outlay would promote more careful consideration before making a decision to own a dog, aligning with the aim of promoting responsible dog ownership. Current concessions are available where a dog

	has been neutered / spayed and those in receipt of income related benefit or a member of a couple that receives an income-related benefit. • Officers would also suggest a nominal fee for the current free licences which are automatically provided to those over 65 years of age (first dog licence is free, and then £5 for each additional dog). • A dog license is not required for a puppy under six months old and kept by the person who was also the keeper of the bitch that gave birth to the puppy; an assistance dog used by a disabled person; a dog kept, and on offer for sale, in a licensed pet shop; a police dog; or a dog kept under a block licence, on the premises to which the block licence relates. • An automatic annual index-linked inflationary increase should be incorporated within the proposed legislative amendment so that councils do not have to wait for further review and legislative changes to allow for future increases.
3.20	<u>Ban on Specified Aversive Training Devices</u> Whilst officers strongly support a ban on the use of handheld remote controlled electric shock collars (e-collars), choke collars and prong collars on dogs and cats, we would prefer a ban on the SALE and possession of these devices. It is felt that further effective enforcement should include powers to seize devices and the use of Fixed Penalty Notices.
3.21	<u>Strengthening microchipping requirements for dogs</u> Whilst officers support the objective of improving traceability, the Regulatory Impact Assessment does not adequately reflect the operational and financial burden on councils. In particular, the absence of quantified enforcement, staffing, IT, and administrative costs presents a significant gap. The proposals assume improved outcomes without recognising the scale of current non-compliance or the resource required to achieve behavioural change.
3.22	<u>Call for evidence on microchipping of pet cats</u> In general, officers agree that the microchipping of cats assists with the traceability and identification of 'owned cats '. **However, we see no role for councils in the enforcement of any mandatory microchipping of cats.** Where owners keep their details accurate and up to date, databases play an important role in reuniting these animals with their keepers. Council officers recognise microchipping may

	assist in reuniting lost cats with owners, help identify cats involved in traffic accidents and assist in identifying former owners where cats have been abandoned. The proposed limited enforcement tools and the potential financial burden of enforcement and prosecution, raise concerns about the proportionality and practicality of the proposals. We believe the objectives can be achieved without the imposition of a mandatory legal requirement to microchip cats, through the promotion of overall responsible cat ownership led by DAERA, including promoting the health and welfare benefits of microchipping, neutering and vaccination to owners. Other interested stakeholders such as Cats Protection and similar animal charities are best placed to deliver such campaigns with the appropriate level of funding from DAERA and supported by councils.
3.23	**Financial and Resource Implications** The Department has completed several Regulatory Impact Assessments (RIAs) (**Appendices 4 - 7**). There are significant concerns about the potential financial and resource implications of these proposals and our concerns have been highlighted throughout our response to the consultation.
3.24	**Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment** The Department has completed several Equality and Disability Screening Exercises (See Appendices 4 - 7) and several Rural Needs Impact Assessments (RNIA). We have made comments on both in our response – see Q9, Q10, Q12, Q17, Q18 and Q20.
4.0	**Appendices**
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Animal Welfare Pathway

Advancing Animal Welfare in Northern Ireland 2025-27

Department of
Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs
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Talmhaíochta, Comhshaoil agus Gnóthaí Tuaithe
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Fairmin, Environment an' Kintra Matthers
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Ministerial Foreword

Since taking up office, a top priority for me has been furthering animal welfare. That is why it is now front and centre as a key pledge within my Department's 10-point Corporate Plan 2025-27 which commits DAERA to deliver a range of new animal welfare priorities to protect domestic and farmed animals.

In the early stages of my tenure, I have already brought in powers to enable pet theft to be prosecuted in a way which reflects that companion animals are more than just objects. Additionally, I acted swiftly to protect public safety in relation to XL Bully type dogs. The high levels of compliance with the new legal requirements demonstrate that the vast majority of dog owners are responsible.

In addition, my Department has established robust and dynamic working relationships with statutory bodies such as local councils and the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) to combat the persistent issue of puppy smuggling. This collaborative effort ensures that animal welfare standards are upheld and that those involved in illegal activities are brought to justice. This unified approach not only safeguards the well-being of animals but also promotes public awareness and compliance with existing laws, thereby creating a safer environment for both pets and their owners.

Animal welfare is an important focus for my Department, and there is an opportunity to update our laws. However, due to the limited duration of this mandate, it is necessary to prioritise tasks, as there is not enough time or capacity to accomplish everything.

That is why I have engaged and listened to organisations who look after and care for animals and identified a set of measures which can deliver the most immediate and transformative outcomes. The engagement has resulted in this document - my Animal Welfare Pathway - Advancing Animal Welfare in Northern Ireland 2025-27.

The proposals below represent only the policy and legislative reforms, identified as priorities, that can practicably be achieved in the time ahead. I would highlight that in addition to this there continues to be a huge amount of ongoing work by my officials in both enforcement and administration to ensure the ongoing welfare of our animals.

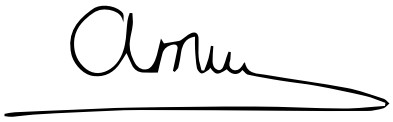
These proposals will help further strengthen existing animal welfare legislation, help tackle problems effectively and re-define how we interact or treat our animals. This document recognises the significant place that animals have in our lives, and the changes that it recommends will further protect them, whether they are in our homes, on our farms, if they are used for breeding, if they are being offered for sale, or if they are put on display.

Working together with other stakeholders and the wider public, we recognise that we can only make progress by partnership working, involving all organisations and individuals with responsibility for, and an interest in, animal welfare. We strive to enhance the overall welfare

of animals, so they receive the care and protection they deserve. It is important to stress that to achieve a good quality of life for our animals, raising awareness of good practice and educating owners is as important as effective legislation and a strong enforcement regime.

However, I am mindful that in many important areas, we are still reliant on legislation that is almost 50 years old. Clearly, there is much more to do. Better ways of safeguarding welfare and further reform are imperative. Therefore, I am also determined to make sure I create strong foundations for an even more ambitious programme for the next Assembly term.

This pathway demonstrates my desire to deliver meaningful improvements for NI and highlights that, working together, we take proactive and meaningful actions to further promote, enhance and protect the welfare of all our animals.



Andrew Muir MLA
Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

21st May 2025

Introduction

Introduction

For almost 40 years, the main primary legislation regarding animal welfare was the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 1972 (the 1972 Act). The 1972 Act allowed intervention, and prosecution actions to be taken, only after cruelty or unnecessary suffering had occurred.

Then, the foundations of comprehensive animal welfare protections were laid with the introduction of the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 (the 2011 Act). This Act specifies that animal owners/keepers have a legal duty of care to ensure their animals' welfare needs are met.

Under this Act the five needs of animals were enshrined in law: a suitable environment; a suitable diet; the need to exhibit normal behaviour patterns; the need to be housed with, or apart from, other animals; and the need to be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease. The 2011 Act also created the offence of unnecessary suffering and has provided the ability to impose a custodial sentence of up to five years where a person is found guilty of this offence, which was a UK first. The 2011 Act paved the way for regulations to protect animals from mutilations, regulate dog breeding and make specific protections for our service animals.

The 2011 Act marked a major step forward for animal welfare and introduced a duty of care in respect of all "protected animals", that is, animals under the control of any person whether permanently or temporarily and provided new enforcement powers to allow action to be taken to prevent animals from suffering.

Our ambition is for Northern Ireland to be recognised within the animal welfare sphere for its exemplary standards, its adoption and sharing of best practice, its engagement with key stakeholders, its development of effective, supportive and sustainable mechanisms for enforcement, its contribution to research, and its championing of education and responsible ownership for the benefit of our own and future generations.

This document sets out the breadth of work we are undertaking in relation to specific animal welfare policies, and our intention to drive forward reforms which will improve the lives of companion animals by examining how best to strengthen regulations around the breeding, advertising and sale of pups and kittens; and reforming farmed animal welfare by taking into account the latest developments and proposals within the UK and Ireland, as well as the European Union. We will seek to establish parity with Great Britain by bringing forward a consultation on mandatory closed-circuit television in slaughterhouses.

This work will be delivered through a programme of legislative and non-legislative reforms.

The 2011 Act established that the Department would be responsible for farmed animal welfare, the PSNI would enforce requirements relating to animal fighting, while councils were designated as the enforcement and regulatory body for non-farmed or companion animals.

There is no intention, under these animal welfare priorities, to revisit the roles established and previously agreed when the 2011 Act was passed into law. However, it is recognised that any expansion of enforcement or regulation of companion animal welfare would place an increased demand on councils. The proposed reforms will be explored in detail with all stakeholders and subject to full public consultation. That will also include completion of detailed impact assessments, including regulatory impacts, to determine any consequences on public services, citizens, industry, the third sector and any other relevant parties.

Animal Welfare Policy Reforms

Animal Welfare Policy Reforms

Improving The Lives Of Companion Animals

The role of pets and the part they play in daily life has changed immeasurably since the first major piece of animal welfare laws were enacted in Northern Ireland in 1972. We wish to put in place robust and cohesive legislation to complement and enhance existing laws and deter those who seek to exploit animals through illegal breeding, selling or the supply of pet services.

We recognise that pets provide more than just companionship and form an intrinsic part of household and family life across Northern Ireland. Prospective owners of companion animals want to be able to rehome or purchase a pet with confidence, from breeders or establishments that adhere to the highest standards.

Dog owners, in particular, have made it clear that they want greater rigour around how their prospective pup has been bred and greater transparency on the origins of animals which are bought and sold. There is now a need for a robust system for licensing and inspecting dog breeding establishments, not just to promote welfare and ensure responsible dog ownership, but to allow buyers to make fully informed choices. There is also a need to ensure that those businesses involved in the breeding and selling of pups are recognised as achieving an agreed, rigorous standard and that persons outside the regulatory system, who only wish to exploit dogs and treat them as commodities are robustly dealt with.

1. Prohibition of Third-Party Pet Sales

There is currently no law prohibiting the commercial sale of puppies and kittens by third parties in Northern Ireland, however, the Department is aware that people want to see a ban on this activity.

Similar legislation has already been enacted in the rest of the UK and is commonly known as ‘Lucy’s Law’. The legislation takes its name from a rescue dog who had suffered abuse at an illegal breeding establishment, where profit was prioritised over animal health and welfare. A petition calling for Lucy’s Law in Northern Ireland attracted just under 3,000 signatures.

We will consider the merits of a requirement that sales of puppies or kittens takes place in front of the breeder, and that these breeders, who are also the sellers, must show the puppies or kittens interacting with their mother at the place of birth. We are committed to making laws which will enable purchasers to feel confident that they are buying from a reputable breeder who has given the puppy the best start in life, and who ensures the welfare needs of their animals are met.

We will also explore all links in the selling chain and develop legislation that will ensure that sales activities protect animal welfare; combat the illegal trade in puppies; and enhance regulations for online sales.

We will do this by:

- **prohibiting the sale of puppies and kittens by third-parties in Northern Ireland, that is by anyone other than the breeder.**

This is a significant step forward; however, we are also aiming to go much further by including requirements which will improve the traceability of pups and kittens and make it easier for prospective buyers to identify reputable sellers.

2. Review of Dog Breeding Regulations

One of the first pieces of bespoke legislation which was made using the powers under the 2011 Act was the Welfare of Animals (Dog Breeding Establishments and Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013 (the Dog Breeding Regulations).

These regulations define a commercial dog breeder as anyone who keeps three or more breeding bitches, and who also either breeds, advertises, or supplies, three or more litters of pups in a twelve-month period, or advertises a business of breeding or selling pups in Northern Ireland. Any person falling outside of this definition is known as a hobby breeder and does not need a licence.

Under this piece of law, councils are required to inspect breeding premises. Councils must consider whether the accommodation and environment are appropriate; whether there are suitable whelping facilities; as well as the diet, health and mating requirements of the dogs. These regulations also compel breeders to keep records and have formal plans for the socialisation of the pups bred on the premises.

A licence is only issued when a council inspector is satisfied that these conditions have been met. The licence is valid for one year and the full inspection process must be completed successfully for a premises to be re-licensed.

Any commercial breeding establishment that does not demonstrate to a council that it meets the licence conditions will not receive a licence to operate. This law also enables the council to prosecute unlicensed establishments or any premises that are found to be in contravention of the conditions set out in the regulations.

Stakeholders and members of the public have made it clear that they want to see a review of dog breeding regulations and they believe there is scope for increased controls and greater transparency. This includes a requirement to make it mandatory to publish registers of licensed breeding establishments.

We will do this by:

- **establishing an expert advisory group to review the effectiveness of current dog breeding regulations who will be empowered to make recommendations for further legislative controls where evidence shows these are needed.**

Canine Fertility Clinics

There has been a significant increase in businesses which describe themselves as canine fertility clinics. In 2020 a Veterinary Record investigation reported that there were in the region of 37 such businesses in the UK; now, it is believed there are in excess of 300. These businesses are typically undertaking procedures related to dog breeding, such as progesterone testing (a blood test to determine when a female dog is “on heat”) and artificial insemination of animals.

It is recognised that underground, unregulated canine fertility clinics can promote unlicensed breeding and unethical practices, such as facilitating the breeding of dogs that suffer from poor health and welfare, like brachycephalic breeds. Brachycephalic dogs are those with shortened snouts, such as French Bulldogs, and Pugs. Breeds with shortened snouts are prone to breathing issues, especially under exertion or on very hot days. There is no legislative regime which enables the formal licensing of canine fertility clinics in Northern Ireland and this position mirrors the situation across the rest of the UK.

Section 5 of the 2011 Act makes it an offence for any person to carry out a “prohibited procedure” on a protected animal. A prohibited procedure is defined as a ‘procedure which involves interference with the sensitive tissue or bone structure of an animal’.

Exceptions do exist under the law for registered veterinarians, who are deemed to be qualified under the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966. Consequently, vets are allowed to carry out prohibited procedures, where the purpose is to diagnose disease or treat an animal.

In June 2023, the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons Standards Committee specifically stated that lay people should cease offering intravaginal artificial insemination breeding services for dogs. Therefore, a non-veterinarian would be in breach of the 2011 Act and the Veterinary Surgeons Act, should they continue to perform such procedures.

The Department recognises the need for legislative clarity and an effective licensing and enforcement regime.

We will do this by:

- **including canine fertility clinics in the scope of the dog breeding review. The Expert Group will be tasked with considering the best available research and expertise to determine if and how this sector should or could be regulated.**

3. Microchipping of cats

The law does not require cats to be microchipped or licensed. The Department's Code of Practice for the Welfare of Cats recommends that owners ensure their cats are identified using either a collar or microchip, so that they can be treated quickly if injured when away from home or returned if lost. The Code also advises that cat owners should keep the microchip database up to date with any changes to contact details.

The Department has received calls for the introduction of mandatory microchipping for cats. In researching this matter, the Department is aware that other jurisdictions in the United Kingdom have introduced, or are considering mandatory microchipping of cats. The Department intends to consider introducing a requirement to microchip cats in Northern Ireland.

The Department will do this by:

- **promptly gathering an evidence base, including the experience to date in England and practical issues associated with the implementation of legislation prior to consulting on how to progress with making the microchipping of cats mandatory.**

4. Strengthening Microchipping requirements

Northern Ireland has in place, significant legislation providing for dog control and the licensing of dogs. Since 1983, under the Dogs Order (Northern Ireland) 1983, anyone who keeps a dog must obtain a yearly licence from their council. The Dogs (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, then specified that a licence will not be considered valid unless the dog is also microchipped.

The Dogs (Licensing and Identification) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 sets out the technical requirements for microchipping, and specifies that microchip numbers must be registered on a database, and accompanied by details such as the keeper's name, address and telephone number, and details about the dog. The person who carried out the microchipping must notify the database operator of the details within seven days, and any changes to these details must be notified to the database operator, by the keeper of the dog, as soon as reasonably practicable.

The Department has received calls for the strengthening of microchipping requirements, from a wide range of stakeholders and for various reasons including: improving tools available to enforcement officers, increasing transparency regarding origins of the dogs, shining a light on breeders and breeding practices, and placing more robust requirements on microchip implanters, dog owners, and database providers.

The Department intends to consider how best to strengthen microchipping requirements, and explore the merits of:

- **bolstering the current database requirements to ensure that Northern Ireland dog owners' information is recorded, accessed and utilised in line with industry standards and facilitates pet traceability**
- **making it an offence for dog owners to not update ownership details on microchip databases.**

5. Animal Welfare and Responsible Dog Ownership Campaign

The Department recognises that it has a duty to educate animal owners and the wider public on animal welfare. It is vital that everyone knows their roles and responsibilities. The Department will initiate a comprehensive communications campaign in collaboration with key stakeholders. The goal is to increase awareness of the responsibility of all individuals, including farmers, pet owners, and the general public, to protect animal welfare, thus reducing instances of neglect, abandonment, and abuse. A key focus of this will be to promote responsible dog ownership, with messaging covering issues, such as:

- Proper identification and microchipping
- Regular health checks and vaccinations
- Spaying and neutering to prevent unwanted pregnancies
- Proper nutrition and exercise
- Socialisation and training to ensure good behaviour
- Understanding legal obligations including licensing requirements
- Providing a safe and comfortable living environment
- Recognising and addressing signs of distress or illness

6. Day Care and Home Boarding

Under the law in Northern Ireland (the 1972 Act), a person needs a licence if they run a business which offers accommodation for other people's cats or dogs. Licences are issued by the Department, after the applicant has paid the required fee, and after the Department has carried out any inspection of the establishment and found that it meets legal requirements. The requirements are known as 'licence conditions', and they are set out in a separate piece of law (the Animal Boarding Establishments Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1974). The conditions that must be met by the establishment relate to matters like management, accommodation for the animals, and record keeping.

As the legislation was made in 1972, it was reflective of the needs present at that time. Boarding providers at that time offered 'kennelling', and, for example, animals were kept in single pens constructed of durable material.

Although boarding providers now provide a wide range of dog and cat boarding, where the animals are not kept in individual pens, the legislation itself has not been updated in almost 50 years, but remains in place as originally made. This means that some establishments that wish to offer boarding for other people's dogs inside their own home, or in a designated area which does not include pens, experience difficultly in working towards compliance with the legislation, and obtaining a licence, particularly regarding the requirement to keep the animals in individual pens.

There is a clear need to enact brand new legislation to regulate these businesses, however, this would require repealing the 1972 Act, which is unlikely to be achieved in the time remaining in this mandate. Therefore, as a mitigation, the Department will explore if the 1974 Regulations, which set out the licence conditions, can be revoked and 'replaced' with guidance. The effect of this would be that the Department would still be required to licence any establishment which provides accommodation for other peoples' dogs and cats but would not be obliged to attach the 1974 conditions to each licence it grants. Instead, it would attach conditions, derived from guidance, which were appropriate to the business model of the establishment.

We will:

- **explore the potential to facilitate the continued granting of licences to people who offer boarding kennels, and to enable the granting of licences to people who offer doggie day care and home boarding**.

7. Review of Dog Licence Fees

To obtain a licence for a dog, owners must pay the relevant council a yearly fee. That fee is enshrined in legislation and since 2011, is set at £12.50. Certain dog keepers can pay a reduced fee of £5, for example those who receive an income-related benefit and those whose dogs are neutered. Licences are also free for those aged 65 or over for either their only or first dog.

The Department intends to work with councils and establish if the fees they receive for these licences are enough to cover the cost of administering licences and delivering dog control services, via the network of dog wardens. The Department has already been made aware of council concerns regarding the cost to council, of various activities related to licensing and gathering fees, and is committed to reviewing the current dog licence fee regime.

We will do this by:

- **Reviewing the dog licence fee system to determine if it remains fit for purpose and how best to encourage increased compliance.**

8. Aversive training devices

Electric shock training collars, also known as e-collars, are aversive training devices which enable electronic pulses to be given to pets by their owners. An aversive training device is a device designed to make the animal stop an undesirable habit by causing them to associate with an unpleasant effect such as pain.

The use of e-collars is not banned in Northern Ireland although the animal fitted with the e-collar remains protected by the 2011 Act. This means that a person can use an e-collar on an animal if it does not cause the animal any unnecessary suffering. For example, if a person sets the level and intensity of the signal given to the pet at one which was too high, they could be causing that animal unnecessary suffering, and this is an offence under the 2011 Act.

The Department's Code of Practice for the Welfare of Dogs recommends to the public that only positive reward-based training should be used, and potentially painful or frightening training methods such as e-collars should be avoided.

In response to concerns raised about the use of e-collars, and about dogs fitted with these collars/devices without the owner's knowledge, the Department intends to look at the use of e-collars and explore bans put in place in other jurisdictions such as in Wales, where they have been banned since 2010.

We will:

- **engage with stakeholders to determine issues associated with a ban on aversive training devices in Northern Ireland and take forward the necessary consultation and legislation informed by this engagement.**

9. Regulation of Rescue and Rehoming Organisations

A rescue and rehoming establishment is one that rescues, rehabilitates, and rehomes animals. Each will have its own requirements for people wishing to rescue one of their animals and will have its own pricing/rehoming fee. Rescue and rehoming centres are not regulated or licensed in Northern Ireland. There are no specified legal requirements which provide a minimum standard for provision of accommodation and care, or a licensing and inspection system.

The Department is of the view that licensing will enable improved monitoring and ensure these vulnerable animals are able to be given an appropriate level of care and accommodation, to ensure a high quality of life. Indeed, it has been noted that rescue and rehoming organisations have called for themselves to be licensed to help tackle those with poor standards and to give the public confidence in those with good standards.

The Department will:

- **examine the case for inspecting and licensing rescue and rehoming organisations and bring forward legislation.**

Improving Farmed Animal Welfare

Improving Farmed Animal Welfare

Although animal welfare policy is devolved, farmed animal welfare in Northern Ireland is largely regulated by the European Commission, and regulations on farmed animals, transport, and slaughter continue to apply under the Windsor Framework. The EU has proposed revisions to existing legislation for the welfare of animals during transport and new laws for dogs and cats, and the Department is monitoring the progress of these and the potential impacts.

The Department also continues to work with the UK Government, Scottish Government and Welsh Government on agreed policy approaches/proposals for farmed animal welfare, where there is an evidence based need to develop a consistent UK wide approach.

Additionally, animal welfare is a mandated area of cooperation under the North South Ministerial Council, and there is regular engagement between the Department and the Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine to discuss and develop areas of cooperation, with a focus on upholding and enhancing the standards of farmed animal welfare.

10. Closed-Circuit Television (CCTV) in Slaughterhouses

Specific laws are in place in Northern Ireland to protect the welfare of livestock animals when they are killed. The law is enforced by the Department. Departmental Official Veterinarians maintain a permanent presence in approved Northern Ireland slaughterhouses during the hours of slaughter. They are responsible for monitoring animal welfare at slaughter and verifying that operators fulfil their obligations under both meat hygiene and animal welfare legislation. The majority of slaughterhouses in Northern Ireland are already in a strong position to comply with any potential new legislation, however, there are still gaps across the industry at large with some slaughterhouses having only partial or no CCTV coverage whatsoever.

There is currently no domestic or European legislation that requires CCTV for monitoring or verification of animal welfare in slaughterhouses. However, England, Scotland and Wales have made it compulsory for all slaughterhouses to slaughter animals under the coverage of CCTV. This is because CCTV has been identified as offering real benefits in slaughterhouses as an important complement to official physical observation and verification of slaughterhouse practices, and effectively recording animal welfare abuses.

The Department is committed to providing the best possible welfare standards of animal welfare at slaughter. The benefits of CCTV in slaughterhouses are considered to be achievable through the current voluntary route, however, the introduction of compulsory CCTV would ensure comprehensive coverage and monitoring of all areas where live animals are present in every slaughterhouse.

A public consultation on the proposal launched on 26 March 2025 for eight weeks.

We will do this by:

- **bringing forward legislation making the use of CCTV at the time of killing mandatory, establishing parity with neighbouring jurisdictions, thereby demonstrating our commitment to progressive animal welfare standard.**

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Review of the dog breeding regulations in Northern Ireland, with recommendations to improve animal welfare

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Executive Summary

This report details the findings of a review of the existing dog breeding legislation and regulations in Northern Ireland. This was produced by an independent Expert Advisory Group appointed by the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) in July 2025. In conducting this review, the panel met with a wide variety of stakeholders and visited a number of licensed breeding establishments of varying sizes. In addition, the group reviewed relevant scientific evidence and conducted an extensive questionnaire survey of the veterinary profession in Northern Ireland. Importantly, having reviewed the relevant evidence, the group was tasked with making recommendations for future consideration which aim to improve upon the existing legislation, with a particular focus on animal welfare.

In Northern Ireland, dog breeding is primarily regulated under *The Welfare of Animals (Dog Breeding Establishments and Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013* ('the 2013 Regulations'). Since the introduction of this legislation, the landscape of dog breeding has changed significantly, with increased public awareness of animal welfare and changes in market dynamics, including surges in demand and the proliferation of online sales. Furthermore, the number of licensed breeding establishments has increased since the regulations were introduced.

As the vast majority of puppies arising from dog breeding are destined to become family pets for companionship, the topic is of considerable societal importance. Concerns have been raised by the public and other stakeholders that the existing regulations do not adequately protect the welfare of the animals involved. The term 'animal welfare' relates to both the physical health and the psychological wellbeing of animals. In this regard an animal can be healthy but still have poor welfare if their behavioural and psychological needs are not met. Furthermore, it is important to keep in mind that through the process of domestication, dogs have been selectively bred to seek social interactions with humans, with the human-dog bond and opportunities to socialise with other dogs being central to their welfare.

Moreover, in recent years there have been important policy developments that recognise that animal welfare is more than avoiding negative welfare states but also includes promoting positive experiences and states of welfare to ensure a life worth living and ideally a good life. The existing regulations were therefore reviewed within this context.

The report provides an overview of the existing legislative framework for regulating dog breeding in Northern Ireland. **The widely held view across the stakeholders we consulted and engaged with is that, as currently drafted, these regulations do not adequately serve to protect the welfare needs of breeding dogs and their puppies.** Concerns have been consistently raised with us that dog welfare across many breeding establishments is poor. Taking this into account, this report outlines a number of particular areas of concern (where existing regulatory provision is required or could be enhanced). These areas include: licensing thresholds, number of dogs kept at breeding premises, limitations on breeding related to litter numbers, litter frequency, breeding ages, veterinary oversight of breeding premises, environment and enrichment for dogs, staffing levels and expertise of staff, the welfare of stud dogs, socialisation programmes for puppies, extreme conformation and suitability to breed, retirement protocols for breeding dogs, controls on the sale of puppies, record keeping and traceability, and the licence fee structure and enforcement provisions.

The report evaluates each of these areas in detail and provides a number of recommendations for the Department to consider in order to improve the existing legislative framework. These recommendations relate to:

1) changing the licensing threshold to make it less ambiguous and set at 2 litters of puppies per year;
2) introducing a cap of 25 as the maximum number of dogs that can be kept at a breeding establishment;
3) changes to the mating rules including aspects related to the minimum mating age and number of litters allowed;
4) introducing regulatory protection for stud dogs and retired breeding dogs;
5) introducing a requirement for veterinary oversight at breeding premises inspections;
6) updating regulations related to exercise, enrichment and socialisation of dogs and puppies;
7) staff provision, including training;
8) fitness to breed;
9) traceability;
10) animal welfare inspections and enforcement; and
11) procedures for the sale of puppies.

A summary of the key recommendations that should be implemented as a matter of priority are provided in the report.

Canine companions have many well-documented societal benefits, and it is therefore important to facilitate an appropriate supply of healthy, well-adjusted, ethically sourced puppies as a public good. With this in mind, when considering our recommendations we aimed to find a balance that enhances animal welfare whilst also facilitating the regulated supply of ethically bred dogs. At present, the existing legislation does not adequately safeguard all aspects of animal welfare. Furthermore, the review also highlighted the ongoing welfare issues associated with breeding for extreme conformation related traits, with recommendations made to help address that.

We are grateful to DAERA for establishing the Expert Advisory Group to review the existing breeding regulations and provide recommendations to inform legislative change that will enhance animal welfare. The panel also recognises the challenges around illegal dog breeding and our recommendations are aimed at reducing ambiguity regarding the threshold for requiring a licence whilst also providing advice to assist with enforcement and inspections.

Dog breeding is a societal issue, with existing deficits in our legislation resulting in a series of negative outcomes for prospective owners and dogs. Therefore, this review and our recommendations offer a timely opportunity for Northern Ireland to be at the forefront of ensuring dogs are bred in a way that both ensures their welfare and provides the public with a supply of companion pets that will enrich their lives.

Foreword

It has been a privilege to Chair the Expert Advisory Group tasked with reviewing the dog breeding regulations in Northern Ireland. Together with the other members of the group, Vanessa Barnes and Susan Cunningham, we viewed the task as a timely opportunity to reform the existing regulations, with animal welfare as a central focus. Given the role dogs play as family companions, we felt the responsibility of the task and the need to ensure an ethical and sustainable supply of dogs that are equipped to thrive. Furthermore, the welfare of the breeding dogs, including stud dogs, was also central to our evidence gathering. With that in mind I would like to thank all those that contributed evidence and engaged in stakeholder meetings with us, including the breeders who invited us to visit their facilities. Dog breeding is understandably an emotive issue, and I am extremely grateful to all those who engaged with the group and shared their valuable expertise with us.

In recent years, Northern Ireland has been viewed as lagging behind other jurisdictions in its dog breeding regulations. Our report begins by highlighting concerns with the existing situation. However, importantly, it then makes a series of recommendations to address the concerns. These recommendations offer a framework that would place Northern Ireland at the forefront of safeguarding animal welfare in relation to dog breeding. The ambition of the group is to see reform that results in Northern Ireland leading the way in standards of dog breeding. This includes a timely opportunity to show leadership in addressing welfare issues associated with breeding for extreme conformation. We appreciate that this is a journey and that seeking perfection must not stand in the way of making good progress. We also appreciate that some of our recommendations could be implemented quickly, whilst others will require more time to develop.

When reading this report I would encourage you to keep the term 'animal welfare' at the forefront of your mind. When doing so remember that animal welfare relates to both physical health and also importantly to psychological wellbeing. In recent years scientists have developed validated approaches to monitor and assess the behavioural and mental aspects of welfare and these need to be reflected in the regulations. It is no longer acceptable to consider adequate welfare as being free from negative things. Instead, dogs must have opportunities to engage in positive experiences and states that enhance their welfare and provide them with a life worth living and a good life. Given the benefits dogs provide to us, as

a society we have a responsibility to ensure we safeguard their welfare. This report has taken a holistic and wide-ranging view of dog breeding and outlines a framework that when implemented will see Northern Ireland at the forefront of ensuring dogs are bred in a responsible way that benefits them and the consumers who will purchase their future beloved family pet.

Introduction

Since the introduction of *The Welfare of Animals (Dog Breeding Establishments and Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013* ('the 2013 Regulations'), the landscape of dog breeding has changed significantly, with increased public awareness of animal welfare and changes in market dynamics; including surges in demand and the proliferation of online sales. This has led to an increase in the number and scale of commercial breeding establishments (from 25 licensed premises housing 1,023 bitches in 2015[1], to 52 licensed premises housing 1,913 bitches in June 2025[2]) and a widespread perception of Ireland (North and South) as a major puppy supplier and exporter, with public concerns persistently raised about unscrupulous or illegal breeding practices.

DAERA appointed an Expert Advisory Group in July 2025 to review the current legislation and provide recommendations for further legislative controls where evidence shows these are needed. The group was tasked with identifying any legislative gaps in existing provisions and considering the full range of relevant evidence from key stakeholders, as well as best practice from other jurisdictions, including internationally. They were asked to report on any additional provisions they felt necessary to improve the welfare of breeding dogs and their offspring in Northern Ireland and specifically directed to consider both physical and behavioural aspects of welfare associated with the breeding of dogs.

Between July 2025 and February 2026, the group met with a wide variety of stakeholders (see **Appendix 2**) and visited a number of licensed breeding establishments of differing sizes in Northern Ireland and England). Furthermore, the group reviewed relevant scientific evidence and conducted an extensive questionnaire survey of the veterinary profession in Northern Ireland to gather their views.

The group are extremely grateful to all those who engaged and contributed evidence to this review. What follows is the group's evaluation of the legislation and the welfare challenges / areas for possible reform that have been encountered. This evaluation has then informed a series of recommendations for DAERA to consider and which we hope will enable the

[1] 2016 Review of the Implementation of the Welfare of Animals Act (NI) 2011
[2] Naturewatch Foundation 'Licensed Dog Breeding in the UK and Ireland 2025' (April 2025)

Minister to progress future actions to address key issues and further improve animal welfare outcomes.

Overview of the legislative framework for regulating dog breeding in Northern Ireland

The overarching protection in Northern Ireland for the welfare of all animals under human control is provided by the *Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011* ('the 2011 Act'). This prohibits causing any unnecessary suffering to an animal, whether by any act or by a failure to act, and imposes positive duties upon individuals who have animals in their care or control to ensure the welfare needs of that animal are met[3].

Pursuant to the powers laid down by the 2011 Act[4], additional regulations may be passed in order to secure the welfare of animals or their progeny. Subsequently, the *Welfare of Animals (Dog Breeding Establishments and Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013* ('the 2013 Regulations') were passed to specifically regulate the activity of those who breed dogs on a commercial basis.

Under these regulations, a licence is required for a "breeding establishment" which is interpreted as one or more premises, within the same district council area, operated by the same person from which that person keeps 3 or more breeding bitches; and

a) breeds 3 or more litters of puppies in any 12-month period;
b) advertise 3 or more litters of puppies in any 12-month period;
c) supplies 3 or more litters of puppies in any 12-month period; or
d) advertises a business of breeding or selling of puppies[5]

Such establishments would need to comply with the conditions of that licence and the provisions contained in the 2013 Regulations.

In addition to the 2013 Regulations, and again pursuant to the powers provided by the 2011 Act, DAERA produced a Code of Practice for the Welfare of Dogs in 2016 ('CoP') which states that a person responsible for an animal must take all reasonable steps to ensure that the needs of that animal are met.

[3] S.4 and s.9 Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011
[4] S.11 Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011
[5] S.2 The Welfare of Animals (Dog Breeding Establishments and Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013

This centred around ensuring that the five animal welfare needs[6] were being satisfied:

1) the need for a suitable environment
2) the need for a suitable diet
3) the need to be able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns
4) the need to be housed with, or apart from, other animals
5) the need to be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease

Whilst the provisions of the CoP are not statutory, failing to comply with these would be taken into consideration in respect of any proceedings brought against a person for either an offence under the 2011 Act or the 2013 Regulations and therefore the provisions of the CoP do carry some weight.

Accordingly, anyone operating a Breeding Establishment in Northern Ireland must comply with the 2011 Act, the 2013 Regulations, and should follow the guidance set out in the CoP.

However, it should be noted that the CoP covers dog welfare in general and there is only minimal reference to breeding dogs and the welfare and care of puppies. In this regard, there is an important gap in guidance, as there is currently no dedicated code of practice on breeding dogs.

Whilst the 2011 Act and 2013 Regulations contain most of the legal requirements for dog breeders in Northern Ireland, there are additional statutory provisions contained in the *Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966* and the *Dogs (Licensing and Identification Regulations)(Northern Ireland) 2012* ('Microchipping Regs') which also impact upon the activities of dog breeders and which apply to all breeders regardless of whether they operate commercially or are hobby breeders/one-off breeders. Accordingly, whilst our report primarily focuses on reviewing the 2013 Regulations, other legislative provisions may also require some consideration where crossover occurs.

[6] The Five Domains model for animal welfare were established by Mellor and Reid in 1994 and are now accepted as the model for assessing animal welfare and as superseding the previous Five Needs test. The Five Domains extends beyond the basic Five Needs by looking beyond the basic welfare needs of the animal and considering the requirements necessary for positive affective states. This includes assessing the (1) Nutrition, (2) Physical Environment, (3) Health, (4) Behavioural Interactions, and (5) Mental State necessary for an animal to have a "life worth living".

The 2013 Dog Breeding Regulations

As outlined above, these regulations apply only to those individuals operating a 'Dog Breeding Establishment' and who have therefore crossed the regulatory threshold for requiring a licence as a result of having three or more breeding bitches *and* by either breeding, advertising or supplying three or more litters of puppies in a 12 month period, *or* by advertising a business that breeds or sells puppies.

Whilst the 'three-litter' and 'three-breeding-bitch' rules are straightforward metrics to apply, determining if someone is 'advertising a business of breeding' is more complex and open to interpretation. There is no formal statutory guidance provided on how to assess this, and councils must use their own judgment on a case-by-case basis. There is widespread consensus that determining whether someone is operating a 'business' is difficult to interpret for both inspectors and breeders and there is general agreement across the range of stakeholders consulted that including this element in the licensing threshold test adds confusion and promotes inconsistency in application, resulting in many breeders erroneously falling outside of the licensing system[7].

Individuals wishing to operate a dog breeding establishment must apply for a licence from their relevant district council. Upon receipt of the application, the council inspector will carry out an inspection of the premises and determine whether to grant the application and, if so, what specific conditions to attach to the licence. It is noted that currently there is no requirement for any veterinary oversight of the breeding premises inspection.

Licences are issued for a one-year period and the number of breeding bitches and any other dogs over the age of six months kept at the premises must be listed on the licence. There are no statutory minimum requirements in terms of a staff-to-dog ratio, and the statutory guidance simply states that the licence holder must provide "adequate and competent staffing". There is also no statutory maximum cap on the overall number of dogs that can be kept at a breeding establishment, and the individual council inspector has the power to set what they consider to be an appropriate cap for each premises that is licensed.

[7] For further information, see: Naturewatch Foundation, LIAIR Business test and dog breeding in England.

The regulations stipulate that breeding bitches must not be mated until they are over 12 months of age, can give birth to no more than three litters in any three year period (but must not be bred in any consecutive heat period), can give birth to no more than six litters of puppies in total and must not be mated after the age of eight years except where a veterinary certificate has been obtained. Puppies must be microchipped before eight weeks of age and must remain in the possession of the licence holder until at least eight weeks of age.

There is no statutory requirement to consider the suitability of a dog to breed in terms of their genotype, phenotype or state of health and the resulting implications that this may have for either the health and welfare of the breeding dog or for the health and welfare of the resulting puppies. The regulations are also silent as to how many caesarean sections a breeding bitch may undergo. An area we would consider important.

There are a number of baseline welfare conditions set out in the regulations concerning the provision of adequate accommodation, whelping facilities, a suitable diet, access to exercise and the existence of a socialisation and enrichment plan, as well as a requirement to maintain on-site records relating to the dogs kept on the premises and to the litters of puppies bred. However, little detail is provided by the regulations on the specific requirements of these provisions and, whilst the statutory guidance offers a little more detail in this regard, it is largely left up to the individual licence holder and council inspector to determine what systems to put in place in order to ensure the welfare needs of the animals in their care are adequately met.

The licence fee charges are set out in the regulations and are calculated on a sliding scale based on the number of dogs kept at the breeding establishment. Currently, there is no provision in the regulations allowing for licence fee levels to be revised or to even increase with inflation. Having an appropriate fee structure is important to enable councils to meet their obligations in terms of administering and enforcing the licensing scheme.

Enforcement of the regulations is tasked to the applicable district council where the breeding establishment is located and any offence committed pursuant to the regulations is dealt with on a summary basis with a maximum penalty of imprisonment for a term not exceeding six

months and/or to a fine not exceeding level five on the standard scale[8] (prior to March 2015 the maximum fine was £5000 but this cap has been removed and now unlimited fines may be imposed).

Evaluation of the 2013 Dog Breeding Regulations to safeguard dog welfare and key recommendations for reform.

The 2013 Regulations provide the main bulk of legislative powers for the regulation of commercial dog breeding in Northern Ireland. There is a widely held view across the stakeholders we consulted that, as currently drafted, these regulations do not adequately serve to protect the welfare needs of breeding dogs and their puppies. In addition, animal welfare policy has moved beyond avoiding negative welfare to enhancing positive animal welfare to ensure animals have a life worth living.

Feedback to this group has raised significant concerns that dog welfare across many breeding establishments is poor. The particular areas of concern (where existing regulatory provision is inadequate or non-existent) are as follows:

1. Licensing thresholds
2. Numbers of dogs kept at breeding premises
3. Limitations on breeding: litter numbers / litter frequency / breeding ages
4. Veterinary oversight of breeding premises
5. Accommodation / kennel environment and exercise / enrichment for dogs
6. Staffing levels and expertise / training of staff
7. Specific provisions for safeguarding the welfare of stud dogs
8. Provision of socialisation programmes for puppies
9. Health testing / suitability to breed assessments for breeding dogs
10. Retirement protocol for breeding dogs
11. Controls on the sale / transfer / movement of puppies
12. Record keeping and traceability / monitoring
13. Licence fee structure and enforcement provisions

These topics therefore form the key areas that the group has explored and made recommendations on in more detail and as outlined in the following sections.

[8] The "standard scale" of fines as per The Fines and Penalties (Northern Ireland) Order 1984 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisi/1984/703/article/5

1 – Licensing thresholds

The requirement to be licensed as a breeder is only triggered provided the breeder has three breeding bitches AND breeds, sells or supplies three litters of puppies in a 12-month period or advertises a 'business' of selling dogs. We consider that this threshold of three bitches and three litters in a 12-month period is overly generous and, together with the ambiguity caused by the 'business test,' currently allows too much scope for breeders to avoid the requirement to get a licence.

Due to weaknesses in monitoring / data collection, there are no reliable estimates of total numbers of puppies bred in Northern Ireland. Currently there are 52 licensed dog breeders in Northern Ireland who between them have almost 2,000 breeding bitches and collectively generate in excess of £26 million in annual revenue[9]. It is widely accepted that this is the tip of the iceberg in terms of the overall revenue generated from dog breeding in Northern Ireland and that substantial numbers of breeding bitches are currently kept by breeders without a licence when many of these should, in fact, be licensed.

In our view, **anyone breeding two or more litters of puppies in a 12-month period should require a licence and be subject to the statutory requirements for operating a dog breeding establishment**. The test should be based solely on numbers of litters of puppies per year to increase clarity and minimise confusion and the current specification concerning number of breeding bitches at the premises should be removed from the threshold test.

In terms of the 'business' element in the current provisions regarding the licensing threshold, we recommend also **removing this element** and adopting the approach that Scotland has taken in this regard which simply looks at litter numbers in a 12-month period for determining whether the threshold for licensing has been crossed[10].

Whilst requiring anyone who has two litters or more in a 12-month period to obtain a licence would impose a higher burden upon breeders in Northern Ireland than in the other devolved

[9] Naturewatch Foundation report on licensed dog breeding in the UK and Ireland 2025. Available at: https://naturewatch.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Licensed-dog-breeding-in-the-UK-and-Ireland-2025-by-Naturewatch-Foundation.pdf

[10] Sched 1. (14) of The Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (Scotland) Regulations 2021

nations, we are of the clear view that the resulting direct benefits justify this action. Bringing more breeders into the licensing system would generate benefits to animal welfare as well as associated wider benefits to the public in general. There is an argument that bringing more breeders into the scope of licensing would beneficially level the playing field in terms of scrutiny, making the system fairer for all. Furthermore, it should ameliorate the unfortunate public perception that “licensed breeder” carries connotations of “puppy-farming.” In removing the grey area between very occasional / accidental breeding and commercial activity (and in combination with the registration requirements suggested for all litters), a lowered threshold would also help spotlight illegal unlicensed activity. Moreover, the additional fees generated from these licences could be used to supplement council resources enabling better oversight and enforcement.

2 – Numbers of dogs kept at breeding premises

There is currently no legislative cap on the maximum number of adult dogs that can be kept by a licensed breeder and, therefore, no limit to the number of dogs that could be attached to a licence. At present, it is left to the individual council inspector when carrying out the initial licensing check of breeding premises to determine an appropriate cap on a case-by-case basis in view of the size of the premises, staffing and general set up of the breeding facility. Whilst we see merit in allowing each breeding premises to be judged individually, we believe some statutory maximum safeguards should also be put in place to ensure that puppies are bred rather than farmed.

During our consultation process, we visited a variety of breeding facilities in terms of their size and scale and had the opportunity to observe dogs first-hand in a range of environments. We also consulted with a range of animal behaviour experts and those with direct experience of looking after breeding dogs, as well as reviewing relevant scientific literature on how environment and stress affect breeding dogs and their progeny[11].

Our own experience of visiting breeding premises aligns with the general view from across the range of stakeholders consulted, including the veterinary profession, that breeding facilities housing large numbers of dogs cannot feasibly provide for their necessary levels of behavioural or social needs. Enrichment, social / human interaction, and adequate exercise

[11] See AWC 2024, McEvoy et al. 2022, McMillan 2017

are important for dogs housed in any environments and it is our view breeding facilities containing large numbers frequently offer inadequate exercise and enrichment, and little access to meaningful human contact.

This view is echoed by the results from the survey we conducted amongst the Northern Ireland companion animal veterinary profession which showed that there is strong consensus for recommending a maximum cap in dog numbers. From our survey results, 93 out of 98 respondents answered the question about whether they would buy or advocate buying a puppy from a premises with more than 20 bitches, and 90 of them would not do so. 95 out of 98 respondents considered that there are ethical concerns around keeping breeding dogs under different conditions from those for which their offspring are intended – and of the 3 respondents who did not consider this an ethical concern, one of these respondents still replied that they would suggest breeding dog numbers be capped at a maximum of 5 dogs per establishment. Particular concerns were raised around lack of opportunities for human interaction as well as stimulation and exercise generally.

The 2013 Regulations are arguably sufficient to protect breeding dogs from the extremes of negative welfare, but it is the view of this Group they do not go nearly far enough in promoting positive welfare states. The Five Needs model for animal welfare has been superseded by the Five Domains Model which places importance on offering opportunities for animals to engage in activities providing positive experiences, rather than only avoiding negative ones. We do not consider it possible to adequately address all Five Domains of welfare (particularly the freedom to express natural behaviour and experiencing a positive mental state) at premises where high numbers of adult dogs and puppies are housed, even if higher welfare requirements were to be imposed and increased levels of inspection and enforcement provisions put in place.

In addition to feeding, grooming, having clean kennels and their physical health being maintained, each individual dog needs considerable time allocated to ensure sufficient levels of exercise and socialisation with other dogs and allow for enrichment provisions, including meaningful social interaction with humans. This requires a significant staff time commitment if each breeding dog is to get the individual attention they require for a positive mental state.

It is our observation and opinion that there are stressors inherent in large premises which cannot reliably be mitigated.

The first of these is the need for dogs bred as “companion animals” to be allowed to form solid human bonds. Dogs are fundamentally different to farmed livestock – through millennia of domestication they have been selected for precisely this ability (in most cases now a requirement) to form stable bonds with humans.

This requirement is strongly backed up by scientific literature. For example, studies have demonstrated harm where the human-dog bond has been absent, such as psychological collapse where dogs denied a human-dog bond during critical developmental periods develop a form of PTSD known as “kennelosis” and also risk developing” learned helplessness”. The latter is an extreme form of emotional shut down and a severe welfare issue, the risk of which rises as the number of dogs on a breeding establishment increases. Furthermore, positive interactions with a stable human figure have been shown to lower stress hormone responses in kennelled dogs[12]. Functional MRI studies of dog’s brains have demonstrated stronger positive responses to bonded humans than to familiar dogs and even food[13].

Suitable staffing ratios may mitigate some of the issues, but large numbers of rotating staff looking after animals who are not considered as individuals cannot replace the important human-dog bond which helps dogs to regulate emotion and avoid chronic stress and anxiety.

A further concern on large premises is persistent barking, often a vicious cycle of emotional contagion and resulting in chronic stress. In high-density kennel environments, a single ‘alarm bark’ can trigger a chain reaction across the dogs in the unit creating sustained periods of high-decibel noise from which dogs cannot escape. Research into kennel acoustics consistently shows that noise levels far exceed the thresholds recommended for human or animal safety. Studies have recorded sound pressure levels in kennels ranging from 85 dB (the threshold for human hearing protection in the workplace) to over 120 dB (a

[12] See McMillan (2017), McEvoy et al. (2022) and Animal Welfare Committee Report 2024
[13] Berns et al. (2015)

chainsaw)[14] [15]. The study by Scheifele et al. (2012) showed hearing loss to all dogs who took part in the study and who were housed in a kennel environment for six months where decibel levels were routinely between 100 and 108dB. Further recent studies have concluded that due to the increased sensitivity of the canine ear, the average safe environmental sound level for dogs should be at least 20 dB less than is recommended for humans, which would be around 45 dB to 55 dB[16].

Noise is a potent environmental stressor with chronic exposure leading to dogs' stress responses being permanently activated and "adrenal fatigue"[17]. Chronic exposure to stress hormones in the womb has a variety of detrimental effects on foetuses. In addition, once the puppies are born, they may be further impacted by spending their early development in high-noise environments – leaving them sensitised rather than habituated, and thus unable to cope with normal household noises (such as vacuum cleaners or doorbells), and prone to clinical noise phobia (fireworks and thunder).

One of the (partial) mitigations for exposure of breeding dogs to chronic stress is plenty of exercise and high-quality enrichment (see later comments). The lack of both has been observed in large-scale premises visited by the panel. In our opinion, any attempts to address this in legislation would be frustrated by the significant challenges for licensees in successfully implementing remedies at scale and for inspectors to verify and enforce.

Chronic stress is particularly undesirable in a breeding premises context. Baqueiro-Espinosa et al. (2024) found effects of maternal stress during pregnancy on the offspring, with subsequent implications for the welfare of the puppies. Consequently, high-volume facilities are producing puppies predisposed to behavioural problems[10]. For example, McMillan (2017) found a clear dose-response relationship between the lack of early-life stimulation and dogs developing into aggressive adults. The kennel environment often lacks the varied stimuli required for normal neurological development. Whilst there are other factors which may have contributed to the documented increase of dog-bite incidents in the last decade, there is a credible causal link between dogs from high-volume breeding facilities being inadequately

[14] Sales et al. (1997)
[15] Scheifele (2012)
[16] Mak et al. (2022)
[17] Coppola et al. (2006)

socialised and developing reactive/aggressive behaviour. This adds a compelling public safety argument to the animal welfare ones. In addition to this, there is also a consumer protection perspective. If consumers are to get the product they have paid for (i.e. a well-adjusted, happy and healthy dog), puppies require a good level of socialisation and exposure to a range of stimuli from a very early stage to prepare them for life in a family environment. It is therefore in the public interest to ensure that puppies get the social care and behavioural development they need. This involves being bred and raised in an environment conducive to this, where anxiety is minimised, ensuring that they can thrive in the life they are destined to lead. We do not consider that this is achievable within large scale breeding establishments.

Aside from the clear impact that poor socialisation and being reared in a stressful environment can have on the resulting puppies, consideration must also be given to the experience of the breeding dogs themselves who are kept, often for many years and a significant proportion of their lives, in these environments and how this impacts upon their welfare and well-being. Being housed in barren kennel environments with only the most basic of bedding, little to no enrichment and with only minimal opportunities to go outdoors (and even then, this access being confined to a small outdoor pen area and with no walks / ability to run on grass / olfactory stimulation / chance to play in groups) and little human interaction does not give dogs the opportunity they need to exhibit their full range of behaviours and to meet their welfare needs. Dogs are highly intelligent, sentient animals who thrive on social / human interaction and being confined to such an environment with minimal enrichment for years cannot and should not be regarded as acceptable from a welfare perspective. The group observed significant levels of behavioural anxiety, stress and stereotypical behaviour exhibited by dogs kept in these environments, with these signs being clear animal-based indicators of poor welfare.

It is doubly unfortunate that being kept in sub-optimal conditions also affects breeding dogs' ability to be successfully re-homed and integrated into a normal family / household setting upon retirement. Studies of retired breeding dogs from large-scale producers show significantly higher rates of psychological trauma, including compulsive stereotypical behaviours, persistent fear of strangers and an inability to cope with normal domestic life[18].

[18] McMillan et al. (2011)

Therefore, whilst we accept it may be possible to ensure the basic physical health needs of dogs within a large breeding facility are met, we do not consider that such an environment can adequately cater for the mental and behavioural needs of either the breeding dogs themselves or of the puppies that they produce, regardless of how well-equipped or well-staffed the premises might be.

Furthermore, keeping animals intensively has implications for infectious disease risk and control which is problematic for any species. Much of the guidance for dog breeding premises focuses on mitigating the spread of disease – primarily separating animals (in itself detrimental in a social species) and making facilities suitable for frequent and thorough disinfection. It is now understood that good hygiene is a delicate balance, particularly in neonates who should be developing an optimal gut flora and whose developing immune systems require regular exposure to non-pathogenic bacteria and other antigens from a variety of sources. It is difficult to see how this balance can be struck when rearing puppies on a commercial scale. In addition, when hygiene measures fail, we have seen evidence of breeders resorting to routine use of antibiotics in both bitches and puppies. Not only is this irresponsible antibiotic stewardship, but evidence is mounting that the resulting dysbiosis can cause a range of lifelong health problems in the puppies, including chronic bowel issues, allergic disease and others. Not to be under-estimated is the public health implication of such puppies shedding antibiotic-resistant bacteria in their new homes.

A final reason for recommending a cap is the practicality of monitoring and enforcing all the licensing requirements. We do not consider it possible that an inspector would be able to meaningfully assess whether the health, welfare, behavioural and socialisation needs of every single dog and puppy are being met when carrying out inspections at high-volume facilities – to do this effectively requires each dog to be assessed individually and for their behaviour to be monitored by the inspector. This is simply not practical or achievable in very large-scale premises.

As noted above, currently the decision on maximum numbers of dogs allowed at breeding establishments is subjective and made on a case-by-case basis and determined by the local council for the establishment. We support a partial continuation of this system and agree that each application for a breeding establishment licence needs to be looked at individually by local council inspectors (with a vet in attendance) to ensure that the appropriate number of

adult dogs is stipulated for that particular facility. However, we also recommend introducing a new maximum cap on total numbers of dogs which cannot be exceeded, irrespective of the size of the facility or any individual considerations. **In terms of the maximum cap on dog numbers, we recommend setting this at no more than 25 adult dogs (male or female) at any one time.**

Furthermore, to prevent people from attempting to circumvent this rule by setting up multiple premises **each with 25 dogs housed within each, a breeding licence should be limited to covering one premises/site and that multiple buildings/structures occupying the same site should be classed as one premises.** The licence holder must be the person responsible for the day-to-day operation and management of the premises, and therefore only one licensed premises should be allowed per licence holder. This is intended to prevent the use of proxy licence holders, i.e. those who have little or no meaningful involvement in the running of the premises, such as a spouse, relative, business associate or other connected party.

Whilst we recognise that such a cap on numbers would have a significant impact on those establishments who currently have more than 25 adult dogs on their premises, there are currently 21 licence holders in Northern Ireland above this threshold who would be affected by such a cap. Therefore, we believe that the significant benefits to the welfare for the dogs and puppies concerned, together with the additional wider benefits to public safety and consumer protection (including the reduction of costs incurred in vet fees for treating health and behavioural problems caused to dogs due to poor breeding) justifies the impact that such a cap would have on this very small cohort of individuals. In addition, any introduction of a cap on numbers could be ameliorated by providing suitable transitional arrangements to allow those affected to adjust their business models and downscale their breeding facilities. This could provide a welcome opportunity to focus on the quality of puppies produced rather than quantity.

3 – Limitations on breeding: litter numbers / litter frequency / breeding age

The existing limitations placed on breeding are that no bitch may be mated until she is at least 12 months of age, can only have three litters of puppies in a three-year period (but must

not be mated in consecutive heat cycles), can have a maximum of six litters in a lifetime and cannot be mated after eight years of age (except where veterinary approval is obtained).

In terms of the current minimum breeding age of 12 months, whilst we acknowledge that many other countries have also legislated that 12 months should be the minimum age and this generally would align with puberty maturity for a bitch, the science in this area has moved on and it is now accepted that skeletal maturity, which is rarely achieved before 18 months of age in small dog breeds and can take in excess of two years for large breeds, is the more appropriate benchmark to set for breeding age[19]. This approach is supported by the Royal Kennel Club (RKC) who recommend waiting until a bitch is two years of age before breeding from her[20]. Whilst adopting a two-year minimum age for breeding would err on the side of caution in terms of ensuring skeletal maturity of the bitch, we consider that **increasing the minimum breeding age for a bitch from the current level of 12 months to 18 months of** age at the time of mating would be sufficient to safeguard the welfare needs of the dog and this approach would also mirror that of the higher level of licensing rules imposed under the English dog breeding regulations[21].

The current provisions allow for three litters in a three-year period with the caveat that no bitch can be mated in consecutive heat cycles. Due to variations from dog to dog in heat cycle frequencies, this element of the current regulations is difficult to police as it would be hard for an inspector to prove whether or not a bitch has been allowed the required rest cycle in between being bred or not. We therefore recommend simplifying this requirement and adopting the same approach as the other devolved nations and specifying a time period between litters during which a bitch cannot give birth to a further litter of puppies. The English licensing regulations stipulate a 12-month period in this regard, and this approach has also been adopted in the Scottish and Welsh breeding regulations. We therefore recommend adopting this same approach in Northern Ireland, with **12 months between the date of the last litter and the next mating.**

[19] (EFSA) et al. (2023)

[20] https://www.royalkennelclub.com/dog-breeding/before-breeding/should-i-breed-from-my-dog/

[21] See https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/animal-activities-licensing-guidance-for-local-authorities/dog-breeding-licensing-statutory-guidance-for-local-authorities - guidance for higher standards to schedule 6 of the LAIA Regulations 2018

The current breeding regulations specify that a dog can have a maximum of six litters in a lifetime and should not be bred after the age of eight years. In view of our recommendation to raise the age at which a dog may have her first litter to 18 months and, assuming a litter-interval of 12 months is applied, we recommend reducing the current maximum number of litters in a **lifetime to a maximum of four litters.**

As noted above, the regulations are currently silent on how many caesarean sections a breeding dog may undergo before they must be retired from breeding. Giving birth in animals ought to be a natural process in as many cases as possible. It is unfortunate and ethically unacceptable that some dog breeds have been manipulated to the point where the ability to reproduce without human intervention is a rarity. Carrying out repeated caesarean sections removes the selection pressure for ease of birthing, with the latter being an important welfare consideration (Baqueiro-Espinosa et al. 2022). Caesarean sections also pose serious health risks and welfare issues for the breeding dog concerned (e.g. AWC 2024) and this is something that provision should be made for in the regulations. **We recommend that any dog who has required a caesarean section should not be bred from again**. Therefore, the regulations should state that the maximum number of caesarean sections permitted is one. This mirrors the higher standards imposed by the English dog breeding regulations[22]. We also recommend that it should be a requirement of the regulations that details of any breeding dog on a licence who has had to undergo a caesarean section should be recorded on the licence for the breeding premises and also ideally on the dog's individual dog licence and microchip.

4 – Veterinary Oversight of Breeding Premises and Inspections

Currently, there is no statutory requirement for any veterinary oversight during the inspection / application process for a breeding establishment licence and breeders are only required to seek veterinary advice where dogs show signs of disease, injury or illness. **We consider that the presence of a qualified independent vet with expertise in companion animal care and breeding, including behavioural welfare needs, should be a requirement for the first inspection of a breeding premises that a licence has been applied for, and also at each subsequent licence renewal check**. This would ensure an independent veterinary assessment of the breeding dogs at the premises to check their health and welfare as well as

[22] Ibid

assessment of effective socialisation and enrichment protocols in addition to the appropriateness of the general kennel facilities. A key element of this inspection is that it would include animal-based indicators of welfare (e.g. Croney et al. 2019) and not just focus on resource-based indicators.

We witnessed evidence of blanket administration of unprescribed antibiotics, to whelping bitches and to puppies moving to their new homes. This represents not only a significant departure from correct antibiotic stewardship, but a likelihood of permanent damage to the puppies' developing gut flora and immune systems, and a recipe for developing antimicrobial resistance. Blanket use of quantities of anti-parasitic medications also has worrying environmental and resistance-generating implications. In addition, inappropriate use of oxytocin at whelping is another particular concern. Nearly 75% of respondents to the professional survey were in favour of veterinary oversight for all licensees, rising to 90% in favour for licensees with more than ten bitches. Specific concerns were raised that the oversight needed to be someone other than the prescribing vet.

All licence holders should be required to register with a named veterinarian who has oversight of general health status. In addition, there should be a requirement to ensure that any new breeding dogs who are added to the breeding premises during the term of a licence (i.e. in between scheduled inspection checks) have their health and welfare checked before being mated.

5 – Accommodation / kennel environment and exercise / enrichment for dogs

The current regulations impose baseline statutory requirements in terms of the accommodation provided to dogs and simply states that this must be "durable and appropriate" in terms of its construction, size, exercise facilities, lighting, ventilation, cleanliness and drainage and state that "adequate" clean bedding must be provided to dogs. In addition, bitches must be provided with a designated whelping area which includes a "suitable" whelping box / bed, with "adequate" heating and with a designated area within which the bitch can rest away from her puppies.

There is currently no statutory requirement for dogs to have exercise away from their sleeping / kennel area, no statutory provision for dogs to spend any time at all outdoors, no

requirement for dogs to have social contact with other dogs and no statutory minimum amount of exercise away from the kennel area provided.

A little more detail is given in the recommendations concerning accommodation in the statutory guidance but this, in our view, is still insufficient in terms of the scope and level of detail provided. The recommendations in the guidance have an emphasis on avoiding harm / negative welfare and focus on the provision of the basic welfare needs for dogs in terms of cleanliness, avoiding risk of injury, adequate temperature controls are in place, provision of appropriate light cycles, with little within the guidance to encourage breeders to go beyond providing for just the very basic needs of dogs and actively promoting their positive welfare.

There is a recommendation in the guidance for dogs to receive “sufficient exercise for their individual needs” and “if appropriate” with other dogs but this can include indoor or outdoor exercise areas and there is no recommendation that dogs must spend a period of time outdoors each day or have a set minimum amount of exercise / frequency of exercise. Breeders should be able to show that they have a written exercise plan for dogs but there is no guidance on what form this should take / how detailed it should be / what checks should be undertaken by inspectors to ensure it is being carried out or of any minimum expectations / requirements that should be included.

In terms of enrichment, the regulations again simply state that a licence holder must have a written enrichment programme for breeding dogs which is approved by the council inspector. The statutory guidance does give additional details on this point and provides examples of the types of enrichment that could be provided and the need for this in terms of the welfare benefits afforded to dogs. However, as these are only guidance and are not regulatory requirements, we have concerns that there is too much scope for the provision of enrichment to be basic or avoided altogether. We were concerned from visits we undertook during our consultation process to see numerous examples of dogs being housed in entirely barren kennel environments with no provision of toys / distractions to prevent boredom and very little opportunity to socialise with other dogs / humans or spend time away from their allocated kennel / pen. The dogs we saw in these environments showed clear indicators of anxiety, stress, and frustration, with their welfare needs not being met. In agreement with these concerns, not one of the 98 veterinary survey respondents would buy a puppy from a premises where the dams (mothers) were not regularly walked outside their pen.

We therefore consider there is too much scope for subjectivity in the interpretation of both the current regulations and the statutory guidance to them – too much is simply left to the individual breeder to decide what is "suitable," "adequate" or "comfortable" and there is not enough defined statutory protection for dogs – especially with regard to their need to have access to outdoor areas / their need for set periods of exercise away from their kennel / sleeping area, and their need to socialise with other dogs. These elements should be addressed and provided for within the regulations themselves, and with better / more detailed information provided in the statutory guidance on how breeders should effect this. The Responsible Dog Breeding Guidelines endorsed by the EU Platform on Animal Welfare[23] provide a comprehensive range of evidence-based parameters for this. **We would strongly recommend that these guidelines (compiled by global experts in canine animal welfare science) should be used to inform a new Code of Practice for Breeding Dogs in Northern Ireland.**

6 – Staffing levels and expertise / training of staff

There is currently no statutory minimum staffing ratio provided in the existing regulations or, indeed, any mention of any regulatory staffing requirements at all – other than that licence holders must be over the age of 16.

The statutory guidance does outline some basic requirements regarding the provision of staff. These suggest that a fit, proper and competent person over the age of 16 is always present at the premises to observe and supervise the dogs and that adequate training for these staff, appropriate to the work they are required to carry out, should be provided along with a written training policy.

The guidance does not offer any direction on appropriate staff-to-dog ratios and simply states that "sufficient adequately trained staff should be available every day".

Both the Scottish and English breeding regulations stipulate that sufficient staffing must be provided to ensure that all of the welfare needs of the animals can be met, but they do not provide a set minimum staff-to-dog ratio in the regulations themselves. The statutory

[23] Responsible Dog Breeding Guidelines (Endorsed by the EU Platform on Animal Welfare) (2020). Available at: https://food.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2020-11/aw_platform_plat-conc_guide_dog-breeding.pdf

guidance to the *Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals; LAIA) (England) Regulations 2018* does recommend that a minimum of one full-time staff member for 20 dogs should be provided at all times (this is increased to a ratio of one staff member per ten dogs for those holding a 'higher' licence).

The "Animal Welfare (Breeding of Dogs) (Wales) Regulations 2014" [24] go further than this and provide a statutory minimum staffing requirement of one full-time attendant per 20 adult dogs or one part-time attendant per ten adult dogs. This is the minimum staffing level permitted under these regulations, and it is noted within the guidance to these regulations that this should not be regarded as the benchmark; council inspectors can and should impose higher staffing requirements on premises depending on the individual circumstances of each application.

The current status quo in Northern Ireland of leaving individual licence holders to decide on what level of staffing is 'adequate' is not acceptable and this should be addressed by imposing a statutory minimum staff to dog ratio. **In this regard, we would recommend a minimum requirement of one full-time qualified member of staff (including the licence holder) per ten dogs.**

Equally, the level of staff training requirements should also be provided. This is currently absent from both the 2013 dog breeding regulations and the statutory guidance, except the guidance states that licence holders should have 'a staff training plan' but with no indication offered as to what this should encompass.

Under the English breeding regulations, there is a requirement for staff to either hold a level 2 Ofqual qualification appropriate to their role or otherwise be able to demonstrate relevant experience sufficient for the role they are undertaking. The optional 'higher' licensing standards under the English licensing system require businesses to have a full-time, permanent member of staff with an appropriate level 3 Ofqual qualification. **We would recommend adopting the English 'higher' standards and requiring that either the licence-holder themselves or a full-time member of staff has an Ofqual level 3 or similar qualification in place**. Adopting this recommendation would also align with the

[24] S.8(2)(c) The Animal Welfare (Breeding of Dogs) (Wales) Regulations 2014

European Responsible Dog Breeding Guidelines which suggest that all breeders should be able to demonstrate competence in breeding dogs and puppy welfare, hygiene and disease control, first aid, welfare-centred dog handling and training, feeding and food preparation, environmental enrichment, dog behaviour, and an up to date understanding of breed-related disorders.

7 – Provision of specific regulatory protection of stud dogs

The current regulations do not provide any specific breeding protection for stud dogs, other than providing for the generic / basic welfare needs to be met in terms of kennelling, diet, and exercise. Furthermore, stud dogs are only currently captured by the regulations by accident. In that, if a breeder falls into the threshold requiring them to have a licence, i.e. they have the requisite number of breeding bitches / litters per year, then the licence covers *all* dogs kept at that premises and therefore the provisions for general care and welfare provided in the regulations would apply equally to stud dogs as they would to breeding bitches. If, however, a dog owner has multiple stud dogs which they use for breeding purposes and generate a fee from, there are no statutory protections for those stud dogs irrespective of how many dogs are kept, where they are kept, or how much revenue is generated from this. Concerns regarding the welfare of stud dogs were also raised in the recent Animal Welfare Committee (AWC) opinion on dog breeding (AWC 2024).

We consider that stud dogs also deserve regulatory protection and that they should not merely be regarded as being collateral recipients to protection under the current regulations if they are owned by someone who needs a licence due to the number of breeding bitches that they have.

During our stakeholder consultations, concerns were raised with us regarding welfare issues associated with overuse of stud dogs (both in respect of the dogs themselves and implications for subsequent breed health), ages that stud dogs are used from / until, and sires who have extreme conformations commanding high fees but having little or no health testing to assess their suitability to breed.

In our opinion, the regulations should provide a framework of protection for stud dogs which, similar to breeding bitches, provides a requirement for minimum and maximum mating ages

(we would recommend mirroring what we have suggested above with regard to breeding bitches and adopting a minimum age of 18 months and maximum age of eight years); suggests a maximum number of litters sired; allows for similar levels of enrichment, socialisation and exercise programmes; and also requires a breeder to consider the conformational and genetic health and risks to future progeny from heritable conditions that the sire may pass on.

In addition, similar to breeding bitches, adequate provision for the retirement of stud dogs also needs to be considered. Whilst many of these requirements may be possible to incorporate as guidance within a new dedicated Code of Practice on dog breeding, there will need to be some adjustments to the existing regulations to enable appropriate regulatory protection for stud dogs.

There should be consideration given to widening regulatory oversight to those owners who have stud dogs only, but do not have any breeding bitches (and therefore fall out of scope of the current Dog Breeding Regulations), and of bringing these into the licensing system depending on the numbers of annual litters sired.

8 – Provision of socialisation programmes for puppies

The current regulations do provide that all licence holders must have a written socialisation programme for puppies which is approved by their council inspector. This is the entirety of the statutory requirements imposed upon licence holders in this regard, and it is left to the licence holders to devise and implement what they consider to be a realistic programme of socialisation for puppies and demonstrate this to council inspectors. The 2016 Review of the Implementation of the *Welfare of Animals Act* in Northern Ireland highlighted this element of the regulations to be inadequate[25].

[25] DAERA (2016) Final reported the review of the implementation of the welfare of animals act NI 2011 https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/dard/final-report-of-the-review-of-the-implementation-of-the-welfare-of-animals-act-ni-2011.PDF

The guidance[26] to the regulations does offer some further advice on this and provides a list of things / activities which a puppy should be exposed to at various stages of their development, but the guidance is very limited in its scope.

The Scottish dog breeding regulations offer more regulatory provision in this regard and go further than simply requiring the provision of a documented socialisation programme. They stipulate that all puppies must be given suitable and adequate opportunities to learn how to interact with people, dogs and other animals as well as being habituated to noises, objects and activities associated with a domestic environment.

As most puppies are destined to become family members and live in households, it is important that puppies are prepared for the challenges and the significant change that their new home environments will bring. This is not just in the best interests of the puppies themselves but also is of benefit to the members of the public who buy these puppies and who, having often paid significant sums for them, expect that the puppy they are receiving will have the basic levels of socialisation and habituation required to enable them to adjust to their new surroundings. There are also wider benefits to society in ensuring that all dogs get the best start in life and grow up to be well-adjusted and socialised.

From our survey of veterinary practices across Northern Ireland, a common theme from responses was concern amongst the veterinary profession around increasing levels of anxiety / reactivity and aggressive behaviour in dogs. Eighty-eight of the 98 respondents to the professional survey stated that anxiety levels and related disorders had significantly increased in recent years. This was attributed to a variety of causes (genetics, poor early socialisation, inexperienced owners, anxious owners, lack of training or stimulation, sleep disruption and COVID) but two-thirds thought that somewhere between half and the vast majority of anxiety-related disorders had a likely basis in genetics and early life experience and were therefore affected by breeding practices.

Whilst there can be a number of different factors which could account for behavioural problems arising in dogs, it is well established in scientific literature that both pre-natal and

[26] Northern Ireland Dog Advisory Group on behalf of Environmental Health (NI) (2011). Dog Breeding Establishment Licence Conditions and Guidance for Council Enforcement Officers.

early natal experiences play a large role in defining dog temperament. With dog bite instances on the rise in the UK and vets referring more and more dogs to behaviourists, it is important that breeders take responsibility in ensuring that these first pivotal weeks in a dog's development are carefully managed to give dogs the best start in life possible. In dogs the critical early life socialisation period occurs between approximately 3 to 12 weeks of age[27]. It is imperative that breeders ensure puppies are appropriately exposed to a range of stimuli and experiences during this pivotal period to prevent future behavioural problems.

We consider that the statutory requirements of the Scottish dog breeding regulations are sensible ones and should be adopted in Northern Ireland's dog breeding regulations. We also recommend updating the statutory guidance on this area (and including this in any new Code of Practice on dog breeding) to provide more detail on what is expected of licence holders in this regard and to bring it more in line with current best practice and recent thinking on the socialisation of puppies.

9 – Health testing / consideration of a dog's suitability to breed

The current regulations make no mention of breeders being required to undertake any form of health testing or fitness to breed checks on their breeding dogs and the only mention of health is simply that a breeder must 'take all reasonable steps to protect dogs from pain, suffering, injury and disease'. This statutory duty appears to be limited to the breeding dogs only and would not extend to having a duty to safeguard the welfare of future progeny by assessing the breeding dogs in any pairing for genotypical or phenotypical conditions or conformational traits which are heritable and likely to be passed on to the resulting puppies.

The statutory guidance to the regulations[28] advises breeders should "make every reasonable effort to ensure both sires and bitches are in good health prior to mating" and this includes checking for the presence of genetically inherited conditions which could affect the health of the resulting puppies but as already noted, the guidance does not form part of the licence holder's legal obligations.

[27] McEvoy et al. 2022
[28] 7(6) Dog Breeding Establishment Licence Conditions and Guidance for Council Enforcement Officers.

This lack of regulatory protection for future progeny should be addressed and provisions included to ensure that the suitability of both breeding dogs is assessed to check for any heritable conditions or poor conformational traits that could reasonably be expected to be passed on to the resulting puppies and which would be likely to have an impact on their health or welfare.

The deliberate breeding of dogs to have extreme conformation traits, such as brachycephaly, is widely regarded as one of the biggest causes of health and welfare issues affecting dogs across the UK today with over 25% of dogs having at least one extreme conformation trait[29]. A dog with an 'extreme conformation' is one whose physical features have been exaggerated to make them look a certain way through selective breeding techniques. Traits such as excessive skin folds on the face or body, lack of a tail or very shortened tail, shortened muzzle / flat-face, bulging eyes, shortened legs or elongated spines are all examples of extreme conformation characteristics. Many of these extreme characteristics have been popularised via social media and the media and are currently considered fashionable or 'cute' and dogs with these extreme traits can command higher prices due to the increased demand, which in turn fuels the supply.

However, many owners and members of the public are unaware that dogs with extreme conformations often have significantly increased risks of experiencing pain, suffering and lifelong health and welfare issues. These can include difficulty breathing, inability to exercise normally, joint and spine problems, eye conditions, unpleasant and painful skin infections, deafness and for some dogs a significant reduction in life expectancy. In addition, some dogs can also encounter difficulties in performing basic canine functions and behaviours such as self-grooming and being able to communicate with other dogs.

There is increasing evidence that living with these extreme physical traits and their associated pain and health issues has a major impact upon dog behaviour and temperament, giving rise to a greater incidence of anxiety and aggressiveness / reactivity in affected dogs.

In addition to direct animal welfare issues, the health consequences of extreme conformation breeding are also a source of emotional distress to owners and represent a significant

[29] https://www.innatehealthassessment.org/news-updates-blog/Blog%20Post%20Title%20One-3zaa9-zlxng-8zplt

financial burden. Costs associated with alleviating health conditions associated with extreme conformations can run into thousands, and pet insurance premiums are significantly higher for those dog breeds known to suffer from them.

In the most severe cases, veterinary interventions to rectify extreme conformations will not improve welfare sufficiently to allow a healthy and pain free life, and very sadly the only option left for these animals may be euthanasia. These are an emotional and financial burden that can be avoided if a responsible approach is taken to breeding and only those animals who have a genetically healthy physical conformation and suitable temperament are selected for breeding purposes.

Regulatory provision should be made to protect dogs and prospective dog purchasers from the risks associated with extreme conformation breeding. Both England[30] and Scotland[31] have attempted to provide regulatory protection for this in their breeding regulations but, due to ambiguity in the drafting of these provisions coupled with poor levels of enforcement, they have had little impact in addressing the problem.

The perceived weaknesses with the English and Scottish provisions in combatting extreme conformation breeding practices stems from the use of ambiguous wording in terms of what a breeder's legal obligations are in this regard. In both cases, the wording used simply states a breeder must not breed from a dog where it could be 'reasonably expected' that harm could occur to either the breeding dog's health or welfare or the health or welfare of their offspring but provides scant guidance as to what this means. The use of the word 'reasonably' introduces a subjective element which allows breeders to hide behind often tenuous arguments that they did not 'reasonably expect' harm to occur and that they believe they took the 'reasonable' steps necessary to check the suitability of a dog to breed.

We recommend that breeders must be required to check that any breeding dog they use (whether male or female) is 'fit to breed'. The options for how a breeder should

[30] Schedule 6, condition 6, para 5 of The Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (England) Regulations 2018 provide that "No dog may be kept for breeding if it can reasonably be expected, on the basis of its genotype, phenotype or state of health, that breeding from it could have a detrimental effect on its health or welfare or welfare of its offspring".

[31] Schedule 6, condition 8, para 5 of The Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (Scotland) Regulations 2021 has an almost identical provision to the one above contained in the English LAIA Regs save that they use the word "conformation" rather than "phenotype".

evidence this (in terms of either undergoing a full veterinary assessment or using any other approved health check/ assessment) should be listed in the accompanying statutory guidance to the new NI breeding regs. There is an opportunity for NI to lead the way in this area and to learn lessons from the existing legislation elsewhere. More than 95% of local veterinary professionals surveyed wanted to see an obligation similar to Schedule 6(6) 5 of the English Licensing Activities Involving Animals Regulations included in our legislation.

A further factor in the lack of success and enforcement of the provisions in the Scottish and English regulations is due to is a general lack of understanding on the part of breeders and licensing officers about the importance of breeding dog selection and what constitutes good innate health (i.e. a healthy conformation).

Much work has been done in recent years to try to raise public awareness of the health and welfare issues associated with extreme conformation breeding, and to provide breeders and licensing inspectors with an objective way of assessing breeding dog suitability.

The All-Party Parliamentary Group for Animal Welfare, in conjunction with the Royal Veterinary College, have recently developed and launched an Innate Health Assessment tool (IHA)[32] for dogs. This is a visual assessment tool which checks any dog being considered for breeding for the presence of 10 of the most problematic extreme conformation traits from a welfare perspective. The IHA was launched in November 2025 as a voluntary digital self-assessment tool to aid breeders in making breeding choices and in selecting their breeding pairs. Importantly, the IHA can also be used by licensing officers as one of the monitoring tools available to them when carrying out inspections of licensed premises providing them with an objective means of verifying that the dogs selected by the breeder for use are suitable and that reasonable steps have been taken by the breeder to follow the regulatory requirements concerning suitability to breed and to meet their duty to consider any health implications for future progeny.

The IHA has received widespread support / endorsement from across the spectrum of veterinary professional bodies, animal welfare charities and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), animal welfare enforcement bodies and the Royal Kennel Club

[32] www.innatehealthassessment.org

(RKC). It has been endorsed by Animal Licensing Wales who have recommended their local authority licensing officers utilise it when assessing the suitability of breeding dogs during licensing checks, and it is hoped that it will also assist in bridging the gaps in the existing regulations in England and Scotland, providing an important lever to enforcement. The IHA is free to use and does not need any veterinary oversight. This tool and other similar approaches should form part of a holistic approach to assessment that also considers genetic conditions that may not be immediately externally visible to ensure breeders demonstrate compliance with their legal requirement to ensure a breeding dog is 'fit to breed'.
The RKC are also working on their own version of a test to check the conformation of a breeding dog which will be called the 'Nose to Tail Assessment'.[33] Similar to the IHA, this will again require breeding dogs to undergo a visual check / assessment of their conformation to check their suitability to breed. This is currently still in development by the RKC - it has yet to be trialled and very little detail has been released to date as to what the assessment process may entail but it may be that this is also a suitable option for inclusion in any list of approved health checks that a breeder could use to satisfy the 'fit to breed' requirement we are recommending.

In addition to considering the health and welfare of progeny from a mating, the breeder has a duty to consider the impact of breeding on the general health and welfare of the breeding dogs themselves. All breeding dogs should be checked by the breeder's registered veterinarian to ensure that they are suitable to breed from both a health and temperament perspective and without this causing any negative health or welfare impacts to themselves. This check should be carried out when the dog first arrives on the premises and be reassessed annually (possibly at the time of vaccination checks).

10 – Retirement protocol for breeding dogs

There are no specific statutory provisions covering breeding dogs who are no longer used for breeding save for the requirement to keep certain records relating to any sale or transfer of ownership of ex-breeding dogs. The English dog breeding regulations impose a statutory obligation upon licence-holders to make suitable arrangements for any dog who is no longer

[33] https://www.royalkennelclub.com/about-us/resources/media-centre/2026/february/royal-kennel-club-reveals-2026-roadmap-to-a-new-future-for-dog-breeding

required for breeding[34] and the guidance to this provision makes it clear that licence-holders must ensure any ex-breeding dog that they do not wish to keep themselves as a pet is rehomed to an appropriate environment. The guidance goes on to state that euthanasia of these animals must only be taken for health or behavioural reasons and the decision to euthanise can only be taken by a vet.

We consider that similar provisions and guidance should be introduced into the Northern Irish dog breeding regulations. Breeding dogs have finished their breeding career by the time they are seven or eight years of age (possibly much younger if they have experienced issues breeding or had a caesarean section) and therefore, depending on the breed and size of dog, have many years of life ahead of them.

If these breeding dogs have been adequately socialised during the time spent living as breeding dogs and have been provided with sufficient enrichment and opportunities to exhibit their full range of behaviours, there is no reason why they cannot successfully be rehomed and make excellent family pets who live out the remainder of their lives as companion animals.

There needs to be a regulatory onus placed on breeders to ensure that ex-breeding dogs are adequately prepared / socialised to enable them to be rehomed into a family environment. In this regard, the proposed cap on numbers of breeding animals would also help facilitate ensuring standards of care for breeding animals that promote their positive welfare and ensure they can successfully adapt to a home environment when they are retired.

11 – Controls on the sale / transfer / movement of puppies

This is an area which has been highlighted amongst stakeholders as being of paramount importance both in respect of tackling the illegal puppy trade / puppy farming and in building confidence amongst the public that puppies being sold are done so through legitimate channels and with the appropriate welfare safeguards in place.

The current regulations provide that no puppy shall be sold before the age of eight weeks of age and must stay in the ownership of the licence holder until at least then. Furthermore, the

[34] Sch 6, condition 6, para 11 of the Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (England) Regulations 2013

breeding regulations state that all puppies must be microchipped before eight weeks of age and therefore before they leave the possession of the breeding licence holder.

There is no provision currently though to prevent a puppy from being removed from their biological mother prior to the age of eight weeks and therefore, whilst a puppy may not be sold or ownership transferred before eight weeks, they could legitimately be removed from their mother / litter-mates and transported to another location owned by the licence holder, including to locations that may be outside of the jurisdiction by, for instance, moving the puppy to mainland UK.

As discussed previously, it is now well accepted that the first weeks of a dog's life are a critical time in a dog's behavioural development. The ability for a licence holder to take a very young dog away from their mother and transport them long distances to hold them in other kennel facilities is not in the best interests of the welfare of these dogs.

We would therefore like to see the addition of further regulatory provisions, similar to those contained in the Scottish breeding regulations and European dog breeding guidelines, which require that **puppies must not be permanently separated from their mother and may not leave the licensed premises from where they were born (either for sale, transfer or for any other reason) before the age of eight weeks other than to attend a veterinary surgery for treatment**.

We also note the absence of any requirement for prospective purchasers of puppies to view puppies in the presence of their biological mother. We consider this to be a vitally important element in both tackling the illegal puppy trade and giving confidence to members of the public that the puppy they are getting has come from a known source. Furthermore, if purchasers are required to visit the breeding premises (ideally more than once, see later) and view the mother of the puppy at the time of purchase, this could encourage breeders to ensure that high welfare standards are demonstrable.

Both the Scottish and English breeding regulations require that a puppy may only be shown to a prospective purchaser in the presence of their mother and from the premises where they are reared. Whilst we are delighted that the Minister is due to take forward legislation on the

sale of puppies and kittens, we consider that there is merit in also including these vital provisions within the revised NI dog breeding regulations.

12 – Record keeping, traceability and monitoring

The regulations provide that the licence holder must keep a record of various details including name / number of every breeding bitch including microchip number, date of birth, breed, mating details and details of puppies born. Details must also be kept in respect of breeding dogs held on the premises and any other adult dogs, and details of any new owner of a puppy or adult dog must be recorded.

It is left up to the licence holder to determine how to record this information in terms of whether this is in paper form or held digitally but they must make sure it is available for inspection for three years following the date of transfer of ownership or death of a dog and make this available to inspectors when asked.

We are mindful of not increasing the administrative burden on licence holders which might take them away from the task of actually looking after the dogs in their care. However, it would seem to us that systems could be put in place to capture records more accurately, whilst also streamlining the process to be more time-efficient for breeders. Software has already been developed enabling breeders to keep digital records of such things as they are required to record under the existing regulations (with the ability to share remote access to this with local council inspection teams in real time). These are designed to be easily updated with any new dog's details, further health information, details of any caesarean sections required, litter details of puppies and identification details of new owners and streamlining the process for everyone.

We therefore further recommend that a new centrally held registration system should be set up and that all breeders (including those who fall under the threshold for requiring a licence and breed fewer than two litters in a 12-month period) should be required to register every litter of puppies bred and to provide all relevant information concerning the litter to aid traceability and monitoring such as microchip numbers of the breeding dogs, litter size, microchip details of all puppies and the date and location where the puppies were bred. We

note, however, that this is ambitious and any consideration of this recommendation is medium / long-term in nature.

We acknowledge and welcome that the Minister has recently announced plans to move forward with the introduction of new legislation on the sale and supply of puppies and kittens, part of which would include a registration system for the sale, transfer or supply of puppies.

We strongly recommend that any legislation passed concerning this new registration system ensures that there is an onus placed on the breeder / licence holder to ensure they register any changes in ownership at the time of a puppy leaving their care, and to put in place appropriate penalties for failing to do so.

A framework for this already exists within the NI dog licensing system. Under current NI law it is an offence to take possession of a dog or puppy without previously obtaining a licence (or to supply a dog to someone who has not obtained a licence). The licence can be obtained up to 28 days before taking possession of the dog, which makes seeing the puppy (and its mother, and the premises as per Lucy's Law[35]) more than once more likely and gives the new owner ample time to verify the credentials of the breeder and the registration of the litter. There are other obvious advantages to the inherent pause in preventing impulse purchases (see later).

We regard this as a key element in ensuring a holistic approach is taken to regulating dog breeding in Northern Ireland and see this as the perfect opportunity to create a central register for all dog breeding, recording the details of all breeders, litters of puppies born and their parents. This level of traceability would aid monitoring of total numbers of puppies being bred each year (currently there are significant gaps in data on this) as well as tying puppy microchip numbers to that of their parents and their breeder. This would be a useful tool for enforcement, enhance consumer protection, and also assist in flagging breeders who are breeding multiple litters without obtaining a breeding licence. **We would recommend that**

[35] "Lucy's Law" is the short-hand for the Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) Regulations which make unlawful the sales of puppies and kittens (under six months in both cases) by third party sellers/anyone other than the breeder. Lucy's Law currently applies only in England (2018), Scotland (2021) and Wales (2021) but similar legislation is anticipated for Northern Ireland later in 2026.

this register have a public search function to enable prospective purchasers to check the registration details of any breeder/ litter of pups they were considering viewing.

We have heard anecdotal evidence of breeders currently evading the requirement to get a licence at all or managing to exceed the maximum number of dogs specified on a licence by rotating dogs by moving dogs on/off the breeding premises when they are not being used for breeding and effectively hiding breeding dogs under the radar. We consider our recommendation for all adult dogs kept at a breeding premises to be individually listed and identified (i.e. by their microchip numbers) on the licence would significantly assist in circumventing this current problem. This would enable an inspector to ensure that the dogs at a premise are the actual ones listed against the licence and to make enquiries as to the whereabouts and welfare status of any dog listed which was not present at the time of an inspection.

Whilst the microchipping and licensing regulations do not form part of this group's remit, we consider that these could play a pivotal role in aiding the monitoring and enforcement of dog breeding welfare by ensuring adequate traceability of breeding dogs. We have heard evidence from multiple stakeholders that the current availability of a block licensing option (multiple unspecified dogs listed under one licence) is being used to provide a cover for breeding dogs to be kept at unlicensed premises. In our view, this ability to buy a block licence for dogs in the same household should be removed and all dogs should be required to have their own dog licence.

We acknowledge that the Minister has agreed to review the current microchip regulations as part of the Animal Welfare Pathway and this is very much welcomed. We have heard evidence from multiple stakeholders that the current system is not working well due to the presence of multiple microchip companies operating in the market and a failure to have a centralised online point of access to streamline the process of checking microchip details.

In addition, there are concerns that the data linked to microchips is so limited that it is of little use other than to help trace an owner when a pet is lost. The system has the potential to be put to far greater use in capturing other relevant health and welfare information (such as details of the original breeder of a dog, vaccination details and certain medical details such as history of caesarean sections, numbers of litters bred and chronic health conditions). This

information could aid in monitoring dog welfare, assist in enforcement, and ultimately provide useful data (e.g. longevity) reflecting the entire canine population.

Only 21 of 98 respondents to the professional veterinary survey thought that the current microchipping system is working as well as it could be. The most common suggestion for improving it was a central database for registrations. Various ideas were also put forward to improve compliance with microchipping, registration, and updating of information, ideally linked to the process of dog licensing. The suggestions included public education campaigns on the requirement for breeders to chip, more obvious evidence of compliance such as a collar tag, random public checks, incorporating chip numbers into farm paperwork for farm dogs, stopping internet sales of chips, and making registration by implanter mandatory. Not everyone who answered thought that extra information could (or should) be stored on the database for a chip, but a significant number (37) thought that the breeder details should be permanently kept.

We would also like to see any new registration system being linked to the existing microchip, dog licensing and breeding-establishment licensing systems so that, where sales / transfers are registered, the relevant microchip details, licence number and breeder details are recorded on this one system, and all of the information can be linked.

13 – Licensing fee structure and enforcement provisions

The current regulations set the fees to be charged by a council for licensing a breeding establishment and these are on a sliding scale depending on numbers of dogs kept at the licensed premises.

There is no ability for the council to charge anything further than the set fees as set out in the regulations, and also no index-linking of these to allow for inflationary adjustments to be made.

We have heard from consultation with council representatives that the fees currently charged are inadequate to cover the costs of issuing licences in terms of the inspection process, administrative requirements and then the ongoing monitoring and enforcement of licence conditions.

We recommend this be reviewed and, rather than setting out a fixed fee to be charged in the regulations, that power be given to councils to collectively decide the appropriate fees that should be charged for breeding establishment licensing. This should be decided by councils reaching a consensus on this together so that the same fees are charged across all of the councils, thereby providing consistency and transparency of fees across council areas. This would allow flexibility for annual increases to be agreed by councils to assist in the licensing, enforcement and monitoring costs whilst also ensuring additional costs, such as providing veterinary oversight of the inspection process, are met by the licence holder and that this burden does not fall on the councils to fund.

In terms of enforcement of the regulations this is the responsibility of the relevant district council. We have concerns about the quality and consistency of this, having heard and reviewed[36] stakeholder evidence of inspections that lack detail regarding the evaluation of the premises or dogs kept there compared with those used in other devolved administrations. We appreciate this may relate to challenges councils face with the current fee structure and administering the breeding regulations.

We recommend that all councils put in place procedures to ensure that the same format for inspection processes is being followed with a detailed inspection protocol provided to enable transparency and consistency in approach. The inspection forms should be sufficiently comprehensive and the inspection processes sufficiently robust to ensure that all aspects of the breeding establishment are thoroughly checked, and individual aspects are commented upon in detail. This involves assessing animal and outcome-based measures and cannot be reduced to resource-based assessments. All dogs kept at breeding premises must be properly evaluated from both a health and behavioural perspective as well as ensuring that adequate monitoring of the effectiveness of socialisation and enrichment programmes has taken place.

Furthermore, we have heard concerns about a lack of training and expertise in council staff allocated to carry out breeding establishment inspection processes. All staff connected with both the licensing inspection process and on-going monitoring of premises should be suitably

[36] The panel reviewed a substantial number of redacted inspection reports provided to them as a result of responses to FOIs submitted by the Naturewatch Foundation.

trained for this. We have recommended above that all licensed premises have a full-time, permanent member of staff with an appropriate Level 3[37] Ofqual qualification and we therefore consider that the council staff responsible for enforcement must have at least this same level of qualification if they are to be entrusted with assessing and monitoring breeding establishments.

We would recommend examining the approach the Welsh government has taken with their Animal Licensing Wales and consider building further upon this by exploring removing the task of overseeing licensing and enforcement of breeding establishments from individual councils and instead setting up a new centralised council led licensing team to oversee breeding licensing for Northern Ireland, including monitoring and enforcement. Aspects of the licensing process could still be dealt with by individual councils but under the overall responsibility and supervision of the new centralised team. The model in Wales has one local authority being the lead for this work. This centralised model would ensure that every breeding premises in every council locality is inspected and monitored by officers who have been suitably trained in companion animal welfare and behaviour. Thereby ensuring that these officers have the requisite knowledge and expertise to ensure that inspections are consistent, rigorous and always prioritise positive welfare, rather than under the current system where training and staff expertise varies from council to council.

[37] Most qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland have a recognised difficulty level. Examples of a Level 3 qualification include: A/AS Level, national diploma/certificate, Level 3 NVQ (https://www.gov.uk/what-different-qualification-levels-mean)

Summary of Key Recommendations

1. LICENSING THRESHOLD CHANGED

New threshold for requiring a breeding licence to be set at 2 litters of puppies per year.

2. NEW MAXIMUM CAP ON NUMBERS OF DOGS AT BREEDING PREMISES

Introduction of a new maximum cap of 25 adult dogs per breeding premises licence with an additional requirement that there can be only one licence issued per premises / site and only one licence issued per named individual.

3. CHANGES TO MATING RULES

Minimum age for mating to be raised from 12 months to 18 months and new provisions requiring a gap of at least 12 months between the date of the last litter and the next mating. Maximum number of litters allowed in a lifetime for a breeding bitch to be reduced to 4 and no bitch may be mated if she has had a caesarean section – i.e. maximum of one caesarean section allowed.

4. REQUIREMENT FOR VETERINARY OVERSIGHT

An independent vet must be present at the initial breeding premises inspection and at subsequent licence renewal inspections. In addition, all breeders must be registered with a vet who should verify the health and suitability of any new dogs added to the licence during the term of the licence. Puppies should not be removed from their mother, nor moved off-site prior to 8 weeks of age unless this has been authorised by the breeder's veterinarian.

5. STATUTORY PROVISION OF SET MINIMUM LEVELS OF WELFARE

Updated regulations should include statutory minimum levels of exercise per day, socialisation and enrichment of dogs and puppies, in addition to set minimum requirements for housing and nutrition. More detailed provisions in relation to these to be provided in a new dedicated code of practice on dog breeding.

6. STAFF PROVISION

Minimum staff to dog ratio of 1 full-time staff member per 10 adult dogs. In addition, either the licencee or a full-time staff member must have a relevant Ofqual Level 3 or equivalent qualification.

7. REGULATORY PROTECTION FOR ACTIVE STUD DOGS AND RETIRED BREEDING DOGS

Enhanced regulatory protection for stud dogs, including for those kept on premises without breeding bitches plus new requirements for breeders to make suitable retirement provisions for ex-breeding dogs. Additional guidance on the welfare of stud dogs and retirement of breeding dogs should be provided in a new dedicated code of practice on dog breeding.

8. FITNESS TO BREED

Both parent dogs in a mating must be assessed to check their suitability to breed – both in terms of their own health and welfare and with regard to the likelihood of passing on extreme conformation or hereditary disease to offspring.

9. ADULT DOGS TO BE INDIVIDUALLY IDENTIFIED AND LISTED ON BREEDING LICENCE

All adult dogs kept at a breeding establishment must have their microchips recorded on the breeding licence. In addition, in order to further prevent a rotating substitution of dogs on the breeding licence, all the dogs on the breeding licence must have their own individual dog licence (i.e. not be on a block licence) which should be registered to the breeder / licence holder.

10. TRAINING OF ANIMAL WELFARE INSPECTORS AND FORMAT FOR INSPECTIONS

All inspectors who carry out licensing application checks and inspections at breeding premises must be suitably qualified and should hold a relevant Ofqual Level 3 or equivalent qualification in this regard. Furthermore, councils should utilise the same format for carrying out licensing applications and inspections and follow a standardised protocol for this. We recommend that a new centralised department to oversee breeder

licensing applications and checks be set up to ensure consistency and monitoring across councils in this regard.

11. PROCEDURE FOR SALE / TRANSFER OF PUPPIES TO NEW OWNERS

Puppies must only be shown to prospective purchasers in the presence of their biological mother and from the premises where they are reared. The new owner should be provided with information from the breeder to inform them about the care of the puppy. An awareness raising campaign should be used to remind breeders about the requirements for new owners to obtain a dog licence prior to taking ownership of the dog as per the existing licensing requirements in Northern Ireland and the need for updating the microchip ownership records at time of transfer to the new owner.

Conclusion

Canine companions have many well-documented societal benefits, and it is therefore important to facilitate an appropriate supply of healthy, well-adjusted, ethically sourced puppies as a public good. With this in mind, when considering our recommendations we aimed to find a balance between curtailing harms caused by unscrupulous or ill-informed breeders and avoiding unnecessary burdens on ethical ones. We need sufficient legislation and enforcement to defend welfare without discouraging the experienced and ethical hobby breeder, whilst also recognising that a knowledge gap can cause welfare problems on any scale. In any environment, husbandry must meet the needs of all five domains of welfare all of the time. Our recommendations have been informed by the published scientific evidence, and stakeholder consultations, including the views of the veterinary profession in Northern Ireland. With animal welfare as a core focus, they reflect wider policy shifts internationally that animal welfare is more than avoiding negative welfare states but importantly includes promoting positive experiences and states of welfare to ensure a life worth living and ideally a good life. At present, the existing legislation does not adequately safeguard animal welfare. Furthermore, this review has again highlighted the welfare issues associated with breeding for extreme conformation related traits, with recommendations made to help address this.

Northern Ireland has become a centre for high-volume dog breeding, with large numbers of dogs being produced each year, many for export to the UK and beyond. We are grateful to DAERA for establishing the Expert Advisory Group to review the existing breeding regulations and provide recommendations to inform legislative change that will enhance animal welfare. The panel also recognises the challenges around illegal dog breeding and our recommendations are aimed at reducing ambiguity regarding the threshold for requiring a licence while also providing advice to assist with enforcement and inspections.

At present we have a situation in Northern Ireland where deficient legislation and inconsistent enforcement have created a bad reputation for all breeders, demonising even the good ones. In addition to raising awareness with prospective owners as to what “good” looks like (and the lifelong, heart-breaking and expensive implications of “bad”), we need transparency and traceability so that they can choose wisely and therefore incentivise the very best practices. The Royal Kennel Club has acknowledged that “if governments were able to truly clamp down on poor breeding practices, it may motivate those who believe they could breed well as

it would create more space in the market for them to sell their puppies more easily"[38]. Clamping down on bad breeding is in the interests of good breeders, dog-lovers, and ultimately the dogs themselves.

In addition, once the public can identify "bad" they should be encouraged to report it, rather than be tempted to "rescue" the puppy and perpetuate the problem. There needs to be clear signposting for reporting and then swift and effective enforcement. Too often the public are confused as to what the appropriate channels are for reporting animal welfare concerns and who to speak to about poor dog breeding practices[39]. This is a further compelling reason to support our recommendation for a new centralised system to be put in place to oversee the activities of dog breeders. This would allow for better monitoring and traceability of the activities of dog breeders, provide prospective dog owners with an online hub for information and education and enable them to verify the registration and licensing status of a breeder. It would provide for consistency in approach across Northern Ireland in terms of how inspections and monitoring of dog breeders is carried out and facilitate better oversight of how investigations of poor welfare breeding are managed. By recommending a reduction in the permitted annual litter limit before requiring a breeding licence limited to two litters per year, more breeders will be captured by the breeding regulations and into the licensing system. This will ensure better consistency, oversight and monitoring of a large number of dogs bred in Northern Ireland every year who currently fall through the gaps and are unregulated. The welfare benefits for these dogs in obtaining regulatory protection would be significant.

Finally, by recommending that no breeder should have more than 25 dogs at their breeding premises, we are drawing a clear line in the sand between what we consider to be breeding dogs and that which amounts to farming them. Dogs have been domesticated to require social contact with humans as well as with other dogs. Therefore, how we care for and breed from them needs to reflect this. With the vast majority of dogs now purchased for the primary role of companionship they are typically regarded very much as part of the family for those households who own a dog and they occupy a special place in society – they have a place at

[38] RKC Report on The Reality of Responsible Dog Breeding, pg. 7 available at: https://www.royalkennelclub.com/media/pgnmwavm/responsible-dog-breeding-report-1.pdf

[39] See APGAW's 2025 report on The Four Stages to Better Enforcement, available at: https://apgaw.org/2025/12/08/the-four-stages-to-better-enforcement

our tables rather than on our tables. To prepare them for the role that they are to fulfil, i.e. that of being a well-socialised companion and member of the family, dogs have a unique requirement to be socialised and raised in a way which equips them with the skills to live within a home environment. Dog breeding is therefore a societal issue, with existing deficits in our legislation resulting in a series of negative outcomes for prospective owners and dogs. Therefore, this review and our recommendations offer a timely opportunity for Northern Ireland to be at the forefront of ensuring dogs are bred in a way that both ensures their welfare and provides the public with a supply of companion pets that will enrich their lives.

APPENDIX 1 – REFERENCES

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APPENDIX 2 – STAKEHOLDERS CONSULTED

- Animal Licensing Wales
- Anonymous Organisation
- Association of Veterinary Surgeons Practising in Northern Ireland (AVSPNI)
- Causeway Coast Dog Rescue (CCDR)
- Department for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM)(RoI)
- Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA)(UK)
- Eurogroup for Animals
- Grey2kUSA Worldwide (Greyhounds)
- K9 Fertility Association
- Master Breeder Academy
- Mike Radford, OBE
- Monmouthshire County Council
- Naturewatch Foundation
- Northern Ireland Companion Animal Welfare Group (NICAWG)
- Northern Ireland Dog Advisory Group (NIDAG)
- North of Ireland Veterinary Association (NIVA)
- Pet Advertising Advisory Group
- Pets4Homes
- Purdue University- Professor Candace Croney
- Royal Kennel Club (RKC)
- Royal Veterinary College (RVC)
- Scottish Government
- Scottish Society for Prevention of Cruelty in Animals (SSPCA)
- Voice for Animal Welfare Fermanagh and Tyrone
- Welsh Government

Stakeholder Meetings

GROUP	1ST MEETING	2ND MEETING
Northern Ireland Companion Animal Welfare Group (NICAWG)	28/07/25	
Anonymous organisation	04/08/25	
Naturewatch	04/08/25	
Royal Veterinary College (RVC)	06/08/25	
Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA)	08/08/25	
Welsh Government	08/08/25	
Eurogroup for Animals	27/08/25	
Master Breeder Academy	27/08/25	
Northern Ireland Dog Advisory Group (NIDAG)	27/08/25	13/02/26
Scottish Government	29/08/25	
VetNI / Association of Veterinary Surgeons Practising in Northern Ireland	17/09/25	26/11/25
Kennel Club	18/09/25	
Monmouthshire County Council	18/09/25	
Grey2kUSA Worldwide (Greyhounds)	24/09/25	
Purdue University	03/10/25	31/10/25
K9 Fertility Association	21/10/25	
Pet Advertising Advisory Group	24/10/25	
Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SSPCA)	13/11/25	
Voice for Animal Welfare Fermanagh and Tyrone	13/11/25	
Pets4Homes	30/01/26	
Irish Government (Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine; DAFM)	20/02/26	

Site Visits

SITE	DATE
Site visit to breeding establishment in Northern Ireland	02/10/2025
Site visit to breeding establishment in Northern Ireland	25/11/2025
Site visit to breeding establishment in Northern Ireland	25/11/2025
Site visit to breeding establishment in England	09/02/2026
Site visit to breeding establishment in England	11/02/2026

APPENDIX 3 – Expert Advisory Group Terms of Reference

Review of Welfare of Animals (Dog Breeding Establishments and Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013 and consideration of regulation of canine fertility clinics.

Background

1. In Northern Ireland, commercial dog breeding regulations are regulated under the Welfare of Animals (Dog Breeding Establishments and Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013.

2. The Welfare of Animals (Dog Breeding Establishments and Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013 require that anyone wishing to operate a dog breeding establishment must first obtain a licence from the district council in which the establishment is located.

3. A dog breeding establishment is defined as one or more premises, within the same district council area, operated by the same person from which that person keeps 3 or more breeding bitches; and also, either:
   - breeds three or more litters of puppies in any 12-month period; or
   - advertises three or more litters of puppies for sale in any 12-month period; or
   - supplies three or more litters of puppies in any 12-month period; or
   - advertises a business of breeding or selling of puppies.

4. Activities that fall outside of this definition are commonly referred to as ‘Hobby breeders’. Hobby breeders (for example, a person who keeps only 1 or 2 breeding bitches) do not require a licence to keep a dog breeding establishment. Hunt clubs and charities are also not required to obtain a licence to keep a breeding establishment.

Purpose and Objectives

5. The purpose of the Expert Advisory Group (‘the Group’) is to carry out a review the ‘Welfare of Animals (Dog Breeding Establishments and Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013’ (‘the Review’). The Group will be required to consider the existing provisions and whether there are any legislative gaps. It must also consider the full range of relevant evidence including that provided by key stakeholders and organisations, as well as best practice from other jurisdictions, including internationally.

6. The Review may also consider and report on any relevant additional provisions necessary to improve the welfare of breeding dogs and their offspring in Northern Ireland.

7. The Review must consider both physical and behavioural aspects of welfare associated with the breeding and selling of dogs.

8. The Group must also consider whether there is a need to regulate canine fertility clinics.

Approach

9. The Group will meet as many times as it deems necessary in order to complete the objectives, as outlined.

10. It is not within the sphere of activity of the Group to review how the Department currently licenses or regulates animal establishments (e.g. dog kennels) in Northern Ireland nor to make recommendations on any future licensing regime.

11. The Group will provide the Department with a report and recommendations by the end of 2025 following a six-month review period.

12. The report will be sent to the Minister for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs and to the Chief Veterinary Officer. Following that, Veterinary Service and Animal Health Group officials will make recommendations to the DAERA Minister.

13. The report will:
    a. make recommendations, where necessary, for amendments to the Welfare of Animals (Dog Breeding Establishments and Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013;
    b. make recommendations in relation to regulation of canine fertility clinics; and
    c. make any other recommendations that the Group thinks relevant.

14. Secretariat support will be provided, as required, by Animal Welfare and Dog Control Policy Branch.

APPENDIX 4 – Expert Advisory Group Membership

Professor Gareth Arnott | Chair

Based in the School of Biological Sciences at Queen's University, Belfast, and with a focus on animal behaviour, cognition and welfare, Professor Arnott's research spans from fundamental behavioural ecology to applied animal welfare. He is the Academic Network Lead for the Animal Welfare Research Network, a member of the UK Government's Animal Welfare Committee, and serves as Editor for a number of journals and periodicals in animal behaviour and welfare.

Susan Cunningham

Ms Cunningham is a Cambridge-qualified veterinary surgeon with over 35 years' experience in small and companion animal practice in Northern Ireland and abroad. A past president of the North of Ireland Veterinary Association (NIVA) and the Northern Ireland branch of the British Veterinary Association (BVA) and was appointed a Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE) in 2023.

Vanessa Barnes

A lawyer by profession who spent her early career in private practice as a solicitor, Ms Barnes now specialises in animal welfare law and policy and serves as legal adviser to the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Animal Welfare where she leads their review of dog breeding regulation in the UK. She holds undergraduate and master's degrees in law and a Post Graduate Diploma in Animal Welfare Science, Policy and Legislation and is also a member of the Legal Advisory Group on Extreme Conformation in Dogs.

Dog Breeding Review

Animal Health and Welfare Policy Division
Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

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Email: dogbreedingreview@daera-ni.gov.uk

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Consultation on proposed animal welfare policy reforms in Northern Ireland

Department of
Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs
An Roinn
Talmhaíochta, Comhshaoil agus Gnóthaí Tuaithe
Depairtment o'
Fairmin, Environment an' Kintra Matthers
www.daera-ni.gov.uk

This document is also available on the DAERA website at: Consultations | Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

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Ministerial Foreword

My Animal Welfare Pathway, which I published in May 2025, is recognition that advancing and strengthening animal welfare is a key priority for me and my Department.

As such, I have already taken forward a series of key reforms where change is clearly needed - reforms that should deliver meaningful improvements and increase protections for all our animals.

To date, I have introduced new pet theft laws; facilitated legal parity with the rest of the UK by agreeing that CCTV coverage be made mandatory in all areas of slaughterhouses where animals are kept; appointed an expert advisory group to bring forward recommendations on how dog breeding should be regulated here; and announced new rules on the sale and supply of puppies and kittens. Some of these initiatives are well embedded or on the cusp of being implemented.

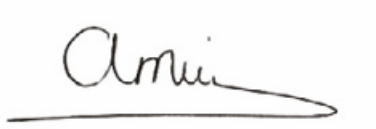
As these reforms continue, I want to now progress work on the remaining elements of the Pathway. I am conscious that the end of this Assembly term is fast approaching, so I am keen to seek views on the proposals contained within this consultation which will help to determine what the next steps are for these important proposals, and what can be achieved in the time that is left in this shortened mandate.

The proposals within this consultation complement and build upon identified areas for reform as outlined in the Pathway, and have the potential to create a strong, cohesive package of measures that can enhance and protect the welfare of all animals and dogs and cats, in particular.

However, I cannot deliver change to animal welfare alone. I am acutely aware that many of the proposals I am advocating require collaboration and partnership working, especially with councils. I also realise the weight of public expectation that councils face when new policies are announced. However, when I held my roundtable discussions, it was made clear to me

that standing still or doing nothing was not an option. A shared commitment and collective action will be needed for lasting change to take place.

I encourage everyone with an interest in animal welfare to take part in this consultation. Together, despite the complexities and constraints, we can take meaningful and proactive steps to further enhance and protect the welfare of all animals in Northern Ireland.



Andrew Muir MLA

Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

Executive Summary

In 2024–25, the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (the Department) engaged in a number of roundtable stakeholders' sessions with key partners including local councils, veterinary associations, agricultural organisations, and animal welfare charities to identify priority areas where welfare protections could be strengthened. This engagement highlighted the need to modernise several elements of the existing animal welfare framework to ensure it continues to reflect best practice, supports responsible animal ownership, and responds to emerging challenges. Following those discussions, Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs Minister, Andrew Muir, MLA, set out the priority areas for reform, as published in the Animal Welfare Pathway- Advancing Animal Welfare in Northern Ireland 2025-27.

This consultation seeks views on proposed changes across four policy areas in addition to asking for feedback as part of a call for evidence on cat microchipping.

Regulation of rescue and rehoming organisations

Rescue and rehoming organisations currently operate without formal regulatory oversight. The Department is proposing the introduction of a licensing regime to set uniform welfare standards, enhance transparency and accountability, thereby strengthening public confidence and protecting animal welfare. The contributions made by this sector are highly valued and consequently, the proposed measures are intended to be proportionate, ensuring compliance with animal welfare standards without introducing excessive bureaucratic burdens.

Dog licence fees

The Department proposes an inflationary increase for licence fees to ensure that they remain appropriate, proportionate and reflective of councils' enforcement and administrative resource requirements.

Ban on specified aversive training devices

The Department is proposing to ban the use of electronic shock collars, choke collars and prong collars, as these aversive training devices pose the greatest risk of misuse resulting in pain, fear or distress. The use of containment fences or boundary systems will not be impacted.

Strengthening microchipping requirements for dogs

The Department proposes to enhance existing dog microchipping standards to require all dogs to be microchipped by eight weeks of age; to record breeder details where the breeder is also the keeper of the dog; and for keepers to update the database provider of any changes within 14 days. This will help ensure more consistent and accurate identification of dogs which will also support traceability.

Call for evidence on microchipping of cats

There has been a growing call for the microchipping of cats to be made mandatory, as the presence of a microchip can improve reunification rates for lost and stray animals and strengthen owner accountability. The Department is seeking evidence on the advantages and disadvantages around compulsory cat microchipping, if this change was to be enacted in Northern Ireland.

Chapter 1: Introduction

The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) is seeking views on the proposals as outlined above, which aim to enhance the welfare protections for companion animals. These proposals include regulation of rescue and rehoming organisations; banning specific aversive training devices; and enhancements to the current microchipping requirements for dogs. It also seeks evidence to inform future decisions around the mandatory microchipping of pet cats and feedback on a proposal to increase dog licence fees, which have not been uplifted since 2011.

The Department aims to supplement existing legislation or policy proposals which will deter the exploitation of animals through illegal breeding, selling, or providing pet services. These proposals will support the Department's previous announcements to:

- regulate the sale and supply of puppies and kittens;
- review dog breeding regulations;
- mandate the use of CCTV in slaughterhouses; and
- promote responsible dog ownership and animal welfare.

The consultation is aimed at anyone who has an interest in animal welfare: stakeholders who work within the animal welfare sector; councils, which have responsibility for enforcement for companion animal welfare; the public; and any person or organisation involved in animal rescue and rehoming. The list of consultees (**Appendix 1**) is not meant to be exhaustive, and responses are welcomed from anyone with an interest in, or views on, the matters covered by this consultation paper.

The consultation paper is divided into five chapters. Chapter two provides the context for companion animal welfare in Northern Ireland and the current legal protections afforded to them. Chapter three details the Department's proposals and sets out a series of questions on these proposals. Chapter four provides information on the Equality Impact Assessments, Rural Needs Impact Assessments, and Regulatory Impact Assessment exercises conducted. The Department welcomes any comments that consultees might have on any of these exercises. Chapter five outlines how to respond.

Councils

The Department has engaged with district councils, as the enforcement bodies for non-farmed animal welfare and dog control via the stakeholder engagement sessions and through regular meetings and forums. This consultation now sets out the proposed policies and specifically welcomes detailed feedback, including any additional or alternative suggestions from councils to further inform final policy decisions.

After consultation, the Department recognises that if legislation is enacted to support some proposals, councils may gain updated statutory powers. The Department considers that councils are best placed to assess the impacts on its animal welfare service and detailed feedback is sought to refine the Regulatory Impact Assessments. As a matter of course, the Department remains committed to engaging with councils to address any challenges identified.

Next steps

The consultation is being conducted using the online survey tool Citizen Space and will commence on **05 May 2026.** It will run for eight weeks closing on **30 June 2026.**

Following analysis of feedback received, the Department will publish a summary of the responses. Subject to the nature of those responses and following Minister's consideration, the Department will then take the steps to introduce legislation to give effect to the proposals. Please note that responses from groups will be considered as one response.

Evidence provided in relation to mandatory microchipping of pet cats will be used to inform a way forward.

Chapter 2: Background

The Department has statutory responsibilities for the welfare of farmed animals under the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011. District councils play a central role as the Act gives them statutory responsibility for enforcing non-farmed animal welfare legislation, alongside the Police Service of Northern Ireland which has responsibility for enforcement in relation to animal fighting.

The Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 specifies that animal owners or keepers have a legal duty of care to ensure their animals' welfare needs are met. Under this Act the five needs of animals were enshrined in law: a suitable environment; a suitable diet; the need to exhibit normal behaviour patterns; the need to be housed with, or apart from, other animals; and the need to be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease. The 2011 Act also made unnecessary suffering a criminal offence and provided the ability to impose a custodial sentence of up to five years where a person is found guilty of this offence, which was a UK first. The 2011 Act paved the way for regulations to protect animals from mutilations, regulate dog breeding and make specific protections for our service animals.

Chapter 3: Proposals

1. Regulation of Rescue and Rehoming Organisations

Rescue and rehoming organisations provide a crucial service for animals throughout Northern Ireland. Many prospective pet owners opt to adopt their companion animals from rescue centres rather than purchasing them from breeders or pet shops.
These organisations deliver vital support for pets in need by ensuring they are cared for and by striving to ensure pets are rehomed with the right families, helping to secure a brighter future for each animal.

Current situation

Rescue and rehoming organisations in Northern Ireland are not subject to any regulatory requirements, unlike pet shops, dog breeding premises or boarding establishments, which must be inspected and licensed. In addition, there are no binding, uniform minimum standards governing how animals are kept or looked after when in the care of this sector. Nor is there a definitive register on the number of individuals or organisations which are rescuing and rehoming animals.

Need for change

While most of these are run by persons with the best interests of the animals at heart, there may be occasions when rescue and rehoming organisations lack the necessary skills, or space to properly care for the animals entrusted to them. Additionally, there is nothing to deter dishonest individuals in profiting from rehoming pets, and from situations arising where there are poor animal welfare practices.

Introducing new regulation could:

- help ensure that all organisations meet consistent, appropriate welfare standards;
- provide reassurance to the public and adopters about the quality of care animals receive;

- prevent individuals from misusing “rehoming” as a cover for unlicensed animal sales;
- help reduce the risk of disease entering Northern Ireland through imported animals; and
- improve transparency and accountability across the sector

The aim of any potential new system would be to support responsible organisations, improve welfare protections, and ensure suitable oversight where risks exist.

The Association of Dogs and Cats Homes (ADCH), a representative body for dog and cat rescue and rehoming organisations across the UK, has established minimum welfare and operation standards. However, membership of ADCH is voluntary and only seven organisations based in Northern Ireland currently hold membership.

Position in other jurisdictions

Scotland is currently the only part of the UK to regulate the rescue and rehoming sector. Since 2021, organisations that rescue or rehome animals, or operate animal welfare establishments, must hold a licence. The Scottish system focuses on ensuring that animals have:

- suitable accommodation
- a safe and appropriate environment
- a proper diet
- staffing and facilities appropriate to the number of animals kept

Scotland’s approach is designed to be flexible and avoid unnecessary prescription while still ensuring high welfare standards.

European Requirements

Two pieces of European legislation are of significance to rescue and rehoming organisations.

Animal Health Law (AHL) requires organisations that move animals to other European Union (EU) member states to be approved by the competent authority. Approval includes meeting standards for biosecurity, isolation facilities, cleanliness and record-keeping.

The second is a proposed Regulation on the Welfare and Traceability of Cats and Dogs. The legislation currently progressing through final approval stages will require animal shelters to register with the authorities, ensure staff have appropriate training, provide regular veterinary oversight, meet welfare and enrichment needs, and ensure adopters receive relevant health information.

Proposal

The Department considers that it is necessary to introduce minimum welfare standards for animals in the care of rescue and rehoming organisations across Northern Ireland. This would align with the approach to other animal related businesses and organisations, such as pet shops and animal boarding establishments.

A rescue and rehoming organisation which rehomes more than five animals within a 12-month period, or cares for eight or more animals (or five or more dogs) will be required to obtain a licence from the relevant council and must meet the associated licence conditions set out in the section below.

Additionally, all licensed organisations will be listed in a public register. The establishment of a register would increase trust in the sector, accountability, deter rogue operators and promote consistency and good practice across all organisations.

Applications will be processed and annual physical inspections performed by local councils with the fee for licence application set by the councils. Councils would also be required to publish a register of licensed centres. Veterinary practices and council-run dog pounds are outside the scope of the proposed regime.

The proposal is intended to be proportionate, ensuring animal welfare is safeguarded whilst not placing unfair or unattainable regulatory burdens on smaller rescue and rehoming organisations.

Charities that are already operating at a high standard will be relatively unaffected by the regulations; rather, regulation will help to highlight organisations that do not meet established standards and prevent rogue traders, puppy farms and puppy smugglers from masquerading as rehoming organisations.

Licence Conditions

The proposed licence conditions are based on the Association of Dogs and Cats Homes (ADCH) standards and broadly mirror those in place in Scotland. If, following this public consultation, a decision is made to bring forward legislation to implement this proposal, detailed guidance would be produced to assist with implementation.

General

- The licence must always be clearly displayed at the premises. If the licence-holder has a website, the site must clearly show the licence-holder's name, licence number, and the issuing licensing authority.
- The licence-holder must maintain all required records in a form that inspectors can readily view; if stored electronically they must be legible and accessible.
- The organisation must receive a visit by a veterinarian at least once a year, for the purpose of advising the operator on animal welfare.
- The organisation must keep appropriate records, as specified, for a period of five years.

Animal Numbers

- The total number of animals kept at any time must not exceed the maximum that is reasonable taking into account the facilities and numbers of employed staff and volunteers on the premises.

Staffing

- There must be a sufficient number of competent staff or volunteers. Staff must be able to recognise normal behaviour for the species in their care, and to identify signs of disease, distress, injury or abnormal behaviour.
- Volunteers may only carry out tasks for which they have been trained. A written training policy for all staff and volunteers must be in place.

Environment / Establishment

- An establishment must provide an environment which is suitable for the species kept and their condition, so that they can express their natural behaviours, have access to water, light and ventilation as needed.
- Animals must be kept in housing that minimises stress, including stress from other animals or the public. If members of public can view or contact animals, appropriate signage must discourage disturbance.
- Dangerous wild animals (if held) must be kept in secure, lockable housing suitable to the species.
- Establishments must be kept clean and disinfected to prevent diseases.
- Establishments should have appropriate, self-contained isolation facilities for the care of sick, injured or potentially infectious animals.

Suitable Diet

- Feeding must be appropriate to the species (quality, quantity, frequency), water must be fresh and clean.
- Feed and water containers must be cleanable or disposable; feed preparation (if done on-site) must be hygienic.

Enrichment / Handling / Protection from suffering, injury and disease

- Active and effective environmental enrichment must be provided to the animals in both inside and outside environments.
- Animals must not be left unattended in conditions that are likely to cause distress.
- Resources (space, food, water, shelter) must be provided so as to minimise competition or dominance.

Rehoming

- The licence-holder must keep a register covering all animals held at the establishment.
- For animals kept in groups (where individual tracking isn't practicable, e.g. some small mammals), group-level records are acceptable.
- For rehoming animals such as dogs, cats or horses, adverts must include a photo and, where known, the animal's age. The licence number and issuing authority must be recorded.
- When animals are offered for rehoming/supply, the adopter must be provided with information about care, husbandry, and veterinary care; a suitably trained person must be available to provide advice; and the prospective new keeper must be given known details of the animal (age, sex, vet history).

Wild Animals

- Where a wildlife rescue is to be released, this may only be done if the release area is suitable for the species; and the animal is capable of feeding and surviving independently.

Question 1

Do you agree that all rescue and rehoming organisations that <u>rehome</u> more than five animals annually should be inspected and licensed?

Question 2

Do you agree that all rescue and rehoming organisations that care for eight or more animals (or five or more dogs) should be inspected and licensed?

Question 3

Do you agree with the licence conditions as proposed?

2. Dog Licence Fees

Dog licensing was introduced in Northern Ireland in 1983 to enhance public safety and dog control, monitor the dog population and promote responsible dog ownership. Anyone who keeps a dog must have a valid licence from their local council. Councils also enforce the law. It is illegal to keep an unlicensed dog, and you can be fined up to £1,000.

Current fees

The last change to dog licence fees was in 2011. Fees are: £12.50 for a single dog; £32 for a block licence (for three or more dogs kept at the same place) and £5 for concessionary licences. People who receive income-related benefits, or who have had their dog neutered, may pay a reduced £5 fee. Anyone aged 65 or over may obtain a free licence for their first or only dog. Assistance dogs and police dogs do not need a licence.

Need for change

Councils now spend more on running the licensing system and providing dog warden services than they collect through licence fees. The current fees are very low compared to the overall cost of owning a dog. Raising the fees will give councils more resources to deliver dog control services, which benefits dog owners and the wider public.

Proposed new fees

The Department proposes to update the legislation to apply an inflationary increase to dog licence fees.

The proposed fees are:

- £18.50 for a single dog licence
- £47.50 for a block licence

Concessionary licences will remain available, and it is proposed to also apply an inflationary increase to the fee bringing it to £7.50. Licence exemptions for assistance and police dogs will remain, and anyone aged 65 or over will continue to receive a free licence for their first or only dog.

Question 4

Do you agree with the proposed inflationary increase across all categories of dog licence fees as set out above?

3. Aversive training devices

Aversive training devices aim to stop unwanted animal behaviours by associating them with discomfort, pain, or fear. These devices may cause physical or psychological harm and are most often used on dogs and cats.

Current situation

The use of aversive training devices is not prohibited in Northern Ireland, but animals wearing these devices are protected by the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011. This means people can use such devices as long as they do not cause unnecessary suffering to the animal. For instance, setting the device's signal too high could result in unnecessary suffering, which would be a violation of the 2011 Act.

The Department's Code of Practice for the Welfare of Dogs recommends that only positive reward-based training should be used, and potentially painful or frightening training methods such as e-collars should be avoided.

Handheld remote-controlled electronic collars are used as remote training devices for dogs. They operate by delivering an electric stimulus through metal contact points on a collar, activated via a handheld transmitter.

While intended to deter unwanted behaviours by creating an association between the behaviour and the stimulus, these devices raise significant welfare concerns. Some models can deliver shocks of up to 6,000 volts for prolonged periods, which can cause pain and distress

Choke collars operate by tightening a metal chain or linked rings around the neck when pulled, so that the discomfort discourages the dog from pulling over time. The perceived benefits of their use such as immediate correction to behaviour and perception that they offer increased control over large or strong dogs are outweighed by the high risk of tracheal compression, thyroid damage, ocular pressure, and cervical spine injury.

Prong collars, also known as pinch collars, consist of interlinked prongs that apply pressure around a dog's neck when tension is placed on the lead. This design discourages pulling by tightening as the dog pulls, gradually teaching the dog to stop. The pressure is distributed evenly around the neck rather than focused solely on the trachea. These collars can provide rapid suppression of strong pulling and offer increased control, particularly for large or powerful dogs.

There have been calls, both nationally and UK-wide, from groups such as the British Veterinary Association and the Dogs Trust, to prohibit the use of aversive training devices, and in particular electric shock collars, due to animal welfare concerns.

Proposal

The Department proposes to ban the use of handheld e-collars, choke collars, and prong collars on cats and dogs in Northern Ireland. It is considered that these aversive training devices present the highest risk of deliberate misuse and direct harm to animal welfare.

Electronic containment fence systems and spray collars were considered as part of this proposal. While both rely on aversive stimuli and have raised concerns about welfare

impacts, they are assessed as presenting a lower risk of deliberate misuse and direct harm than handheld e-collars, choke collars and prong collars.

Therefore, it is proposed that these types of devices would not be banned. Their use would, however, continue to be subject to the general protections afforded under the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011.

Question 5

Do you agree that the use of handheld remote controlled electric shock collars (e-collars) on dogs and cats should be banned?

Question 6

Do you agree that the use of choke collars on dogs and cats should be banned?

Question 7

Do you agree that the use of prong collars on dogs and cats should be banned?

4. Strengthening Microchipping requirements for dogs

Microchipping was introduced under The Dogs (Licensing and Identification) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 to help identify dogs and their owners more easily, improve traceability, and support enforcement of dog laws. A dog must be microchipped for the licence to be valid. The microchip number is registered on a database along with the owner's contact details and information about the dog, making it easier to reunite lost dogs with their owners and ensure responsible ownership.

Current requirements

Under current legislation, there are three options for when a dog should be microchipped:

- puppies that remain with their mother should be microchipped by six months old;
- puppies that are kept under a block licence, or under a licence to keep a dog breeding establishment, must be microchipped before eight weeks; and
- dogs must be microchipped before a keeper can receive a dog licence, and before their sale or transfer.

Currently, a veterinary surgeon, or someone who has received instruction on how to implant a microchip, may implant a microchip. The person who conducted the microchipping must notify the database operator of the details within seven days and if the keeper’s name, address or telephone number changes, the keeper must notify the operator of the database with the latest information, as soon as reasonably practicable.

At present, databases in Northern Ireland are required to record the microchip number, the keeper’s details (name, address and telephone number) and details about the dog (breed, sex, colour, distinguishing marks; and date of birth/estimated year of birth).

Need for change

The Department has received calls for the strengthening of microchipping requirements for dogs from a wide range of stakeholders and for various reasons; including improving tools

available to enforcement officers, increasing transparency regarding origins of the dogs, shining a light on breeders and breeding practices, and placing more robust requirements on microchip implanters, dog owners, and database providers.

Proposal

The Department proposes to:

- make it an offence for dog owners to not update ownership details on microchip databases, such as a change of address, within a specified time (i.e. 14 days).
- requirement for owners/keepers to declare that they are also the breeder of the dog, to enable database providers to record breeder details where the breeder is also the keeper of the dog; and
- require all owners/keepers to microchip their dogs, by eight weeks of age.

Question 8

Do you agree that owners be required to update any changes onto the relevant microchip databases within a specified time, such as 14 days?

Question 9

Do you agree that the owner must indicate if they are / are not the breeder of the dog?

Question 10

Do you agree that all dogs should be microchipped before they are older than eight weeks?

5. Call for Evidence on microchipping of pet cats

The Department is gathering views, evidence, and information on whether microchipping of pet (owned) cats should be considered in Northern Ireland.

This Call for Evidence is intended to gather information to help assess:

- whether mandatory microchipping of cats would improve animal welfare and responsible ownership;
- what benefits such a requirement could deliver;
- what risks, barriers, costs or unintended consequences might arise; and,
- what concerns stakeholders may have, including practical, ethical or enforcement-related issues.

Currently in Northern Ireland, cats are not legally required to be microchipped. Microchipping is already required for dogs, and when a dog is found, the microchip can be read with a scanner and the registered keeper identified. We want to understand whether microchipping could bring any benefits for cat welfare and traceability, and responsible ownership, and the issues or concerns that might need to be considered before any decisions are made.

The Department welcomes evidence from all interested parties and respondents are encouraged to provide evidence, including data, research, case studies, practical experience or any impacts on specific groups. All information provided will be analysed to inform the way forward for any future policy proposals, which when finalised, will be subject to public consultation.

Question 1

Do you keep, or own, one or more cats?

If yes, go to question 2. If no, go to question 3.

Question 2

Is your cat microchipped?

I have one cat, it is microchipped

I have one cat, it is not microchipped

I have more than one cat, none are microchipped

I have more than one cat, some are microchipped

I have more than one cat, all are microchipped

Question 3

What benefits, if any, do you think microchipping of pet cats could bring?

Please provide any evidence, data or examples to support your views.

Question 4

What challenges, if any, do you think microchipping of pet cats could bring?

Please provide any evidence, data or examples to support your views.

Question 5

What do you think might present a barrier for cat owners to microchip their pet cats?

Please provide any evidence, data or examples to support your views.

Question 6

Are there any other challenges that should be considered, in relation to mandatory microchipping of pet cats?

Please provide any evidence, data or examples to support your views.

Question 7

Are there any other challenges, including for any other type of cats, which should be considered?

Please provide any evidence, data or examples to support your views.

Question 8

Is there anything else you would like DAERA to consider on this issue?

Please provide any evidence, data or examples to support your views.

Chapter 4: Impact Assessments and Next Steps

Impact Assessments

Equality and Rural Needs Assessments

Equality and Rural Needs assessments have been carried out for each of the proposals within this consultation to consider potential impacts. We welcome any comments or views you may have in respect of our assessments; responses can be made through Citizen Space or by emailing. Copies of these assessments are available online at: https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/consultations.

Regulatory Impact Assessment

Regulatory Impact Assessments (RIA) have been carried out for each of the proposals within the consultation to consider the potential impacts. We welcome any comments or views you may have in respect of the RIAs; responses can be made through Citizen Space or by emailing animalwelfarepolicy@daera-ni.gov.uk . A copy of the assessment is available online at: https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/consultations/consultation.

Please note that the impact assessments are collated within one document for each policy proposal.

Next Steps

Following analysis of the responses received, the Department will consider and publish a summary of the responses. Subject to the nature of those responses and Ministerial consideration, the Department will then take the steps to introduce the necessary legislation on the proposals within this consultation document. Please note that responses from groups will be considered as one response.

Chapter 5: How to Respond and When

Responses

You can respond to this consultation online by accessing the consultation at the following link: www.daera-ni.gov.uk/consultations.

If you wish to respond in writing, you can request a copy of the written response template by e-mailing animalwelfarepolicy@daera-ni.gov.uk.

Written responses should be sent to:

E-mail: animalwelfarepolicy@daera-ni.gov.uk

Postal address: Animal Welfare and Dog Control Policy Branch
Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs
Jubilee House
111 Ballykelly Road
Ballykelly
Limavady
BT49 9HP

When responding, please state whether you are doing so as an individual or representing the views of an organisation. If you are responding on behalf of an organisation, please make it clear who the organisation represents, and where applicable, how the views of its members were assembled.

Closing date

Responses should be submitted by **30 June 2026.**

Confidentiality

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 gives the public a right of access to any information held by a public authority, the Department in this case. This includes information provided in response to this consultation.

The Department will publish a synopsis of responses to the consultation. This will include a list of names of organisations that responded but not personal names, addresses or other contact details.

The Department cannot automatically consider information supplied to it in response to a consultation to be confidential. However, it does have a responsibility to decide whether any information provided by you in response to a consultation, including information about your identity, should be made public or be treated as confidential. If you do not wish information about your identity to be made public, please include an explanation in your response. Please be aware that confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, except in very particular circumstances. Please note, if your computer automatically includes a confidentiality disclaimer, it will not count as a confidentiality request.

Should you respond in an individual capacity, the Department will process your personal data in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018, and the Data Protection, Privacy and Electronic Communications (Amendments etc) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019. This means that your personal information will not be disclosed to third parties should you request confidentiality.

For further information about confidentiality of responses please contact the Information Commissioner's Office (see its website at: http://www.informationcommissioner.gov.uk/).

Appendix 1: List of Consultees

This consultation document will be sent to statutory consultees and the following organisations:

- Almost Home Animal Rescue NI
- Animal Connexions
- Animal Health and Welfare NI (AHWNI)
- Association of Dogs and Cats Homes (ADCH)
- Association of Veterinary Surgeons Practising in Northern Ireland (AVSPNI)
- Assisi Animal Sanctuary
- Belfast Harbour Police
- Belfast International Airport Constabulary
- Benvardin Kennels
- British Veterinary Association Northern Ireland
- Bright eyes animal sanctuary
- Canine Breeders Northern Ireland
- Causeway Coast Dog Rescue
- Cats Protection
- Clara cat Neutering Omagh
- Corran Kennels
- Crosskennan Lane Animal Sanctuary
- Dogs Trust
- Dooletter Wildlife Rescue
- Drumbonaway Kennels
- Foyle Wildlife Rescue
- Friends of Rescue
- Graces Foster Dogs
- Grovehill Animal Trust
- Husky Salvation
- K9 Search & Rescue NI
- Lost Paws NI

- Mid Antrim Animal Sanctuary
- Millvale Animal Sanctuary
- Naturewatch Foundation
- NI Exotic Sanctuary
- North Coast Cat Rescue
- Northern Ireland Veterinary Association (NIVA)
- Nutt's Corner Boarding Kennels
- Paws and People
- People’s Dispensary for Sick Animals (PDSA)
- Pet FBI Rescue
- Play for Strays
- Rainbow Animal Shelter
- Rainbow Rehoming Centre
- Rosies Trust
- St Columb's Animal Rescue & Rehoming
- The Barn Animal Rescue
- The Doghouse Sanctuary
- The Kennel Club
- The Pet Advertising Advisory Group (PAAG)
- Ulster Farmers Union (UFU)
- Ulster Society for the Protection of Cruelty to Animals (USPCA)
- Vet NI
- 7th Heaven Animal Rescue

Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs
Animal Welfare
Jubilee House
111 Ballykelly Road
Ballykelly
Limavady
BT49 9HP

Email: animalwelfarepolicy@daera-ni.gov.uk

Department of
Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs
An Roinn
Talmhaíochta, Comhshaoil agus Gnóthaí Tuaithe
Depairtment o'
Fairmin, Environment an' Kintra Matthers
www.daera-ni.gov.uk

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Title: **Regulation of Rescue and Rehoming Organisations**	**Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA)**
	Date: April 2026
	Type of measure: Secondary Legislation
Lead department or agency: **Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA)**	**Stage: Consultation**
	Source of intervention: Domestic NI
Other departments or agencies:	**Contact details:** Animal Welfare and Dog Control Policy Branch
	animalwelfarepolicy@daera-ni.gov.uk

Summary Intervention and Options

What is the problem under consideration? Why is government intervention necessary?
Rescue and rehoming organisations in Northern Ireland are not currently subject to any statutory minimum requirements, unlike other animal-related establishments such as pet shops, dog breeding establishments, and boarding kennels, which must be inspected and licensed by local councils.
Although the majority of rescue and rehoming providers operate to high standards and have the best interests of animals at heart, there are no uniform legal minimum standards nor an official register of organisations operating within the sector. This regulatory gap allows anyone to establish a rescue or rehoming service without oversight.

What are the policy objectives and the intended effects?
The overarching policy aims to protect and promote an established minimum standard of welfare for animals in the care of these organisations across Northern Ireland. This will provide transparency, accountability, and traceability around how these organisations look after and rehome animals within their care. This policy is aimed to be proportionate so as not to unduly burden smaller organisations. This policy will also facilitate alignment with EU Animal Health Law (AHL) requirements and takes cognisance of European Commission proposals on the welfare and traceability of dogs and cats.

What policy options have been considered, including any alternatives to regulation? Please justify preferred option (further details in Evidence Base) (10 lines maximum)
The four options which were considered are:
Option 1: Do nothing i.e., no regulation of rescue and rehoming organisations.
Option 2: Registration scheme aligned with current self-regulation, such as adopting Association of Dog and Cats Home (ADCH) standards and registers, offering sector-based standards but lacking legal enforceability, central oversight, and full compliance with European obligations.
Option 3: Benchmark licensing requirements to those of leading sector organisations like Dogs Trust or Cats Protection, setting the bar at a world-class level but potentially excluding smaller organisations unable to meet such aspirational standards due to financial constraints. This approach would exceed both domestic and European welfare standards but might threaten the viability of valued, less-resourced organisations in the sector.
Option 4: An inspection and licensing regime, requiring centres to obtain a licence after inspection, ensuring alignment with EU standards and increasing transparency, although it would introduce additional administrative costs.
Option 4 is the preferred option.

Will the policy be reviewed? Yes	**If applicable, set review date:** 5-10 years post implementation

Cost of Preferred (or more likely) Option		
Total outlay cost for business £m	**Total net cost to business per year** £m	**Annual cost for implementation by Regulator** £m
0	0	£0.017m

Does Implementation go beyond minimum EU requirements?	**YES** ☐	**NO** ☒

Is this measure likely to impact on trade and investment?			**YES** ☐	**NO** ☒
Are any of these organisations in scope?	**Micro** Yes ☒ No ☐	**Small** Yes ☒ No ☐	**Medium** Yes ☒ No ☐	**Large** Yes ☒ No ☐

The final RIA supporting legislation must be attached to the Explanatory Memorandum and published with it.

Approved by: Date:

ECONOMIC ASSESSMENT (Option 1)

Costs (£m)	Total Transitional (Policy) (constant price)	Years	Average Annual (recurring) (excl. transitional) (constant price)	Total Cost (Present Value)
Low	**Optional**		**Optional**	**Optional**
High	**Optional**		**Optional**	**Optional**
Best Estimate				

Description and scale of key monetised costs by 'main affected groups' Maximum 5 lines
N/A

Other key non-monetised costs by 'main affected groups' Maximum 5 lines
Rescue and rehoming organisations that fail to ensure animal welfare create significant public costs, including veterinary fees for animals ranging from £60 to £300 depending on treatment required. Charities and councils incur additional expenses caring for animals with welfare issues which have come from an irresponsible rescue and rehoming organisations. Councils may have to seize animals and incur costs including, but are not limited to, transportation, kennelling, and prosecution. Biosecurity risks and loss of public trust are further consequences when welfare standards are not maintained.

Benefits (£m)	Total Transitional (Policy) (constant price)	Years	Average Annual (recurring) (excl. transitional) (constant price)	Total Benefit (Present Value)
Low	**Optional**		**Optional**	**Optional**
High	**Optional**		**Optional**	**Optional**
Best Estimate				

Description and scale of key monetised benefits by 'main affected groups' Maximum 5 lines
N/A

Other key non-monetised benefits by 'main affected groups' Maximum 5 lines
The majority of rescue and rehoming providers operate to high standards and have the best interests of animals at heart. But because there are no legal uniform minimum standards nor an official register of organisations operating within the sector, there is "room for improvement".

Key Assumptions, Sensitivities, Risks Maximum 5 lines
It is estimated that the upper number of rescue and rehoming organisations currently in operation is 68 (this is the number registered with the Charity Commission for the purposes of animal welfare, however not all of these will be rescue and rehoming organisations), and that many of these already operate at, or close to ADCH equivalent standards. This option works for animal welfare on the assumption that rescue and rehoming organisations are fulfilling their requirements under the Welfare of Animals Act 2011 (WOAA) which includes the need for the organisation to cater for the five needs. This option does not provide additional safeguards as there would be no checks on the suitability of persons or premises, no centralised register or organisations and no increase in accountability or transparency. There is a risk for the public of adopting an animal with health or behavioural issues.

BUSINESS ASSESSMENT (Option)

Direct Impact on business (Equivalent Annual) £m				
Costs:	**Benefits:**	**Net:**		

Cross Border Issues (Option)

How does this option compare to other UK regions and to other EU Member States (particularly Republic of Ireland) Maximum 3 lines
Animal welfare is a devolved matter. There is currently no regulation of rescue and rehoming organisations in England, Wales or the Republic of Ireland. Scotland is the only part of the UK that currently requires animal rescue centres to hold a licence to operate.

Summary: Analysis and Evidence Policy Option 2

Description: Registration scheme

ECONOMIC ASSESSMENT (Option 2)

Costs (£m)	Total Transitional (Policy) (constant price)	Years	Average Annual (recurring) (excl. transitional) (constant price)	Total Cost (Present Value)
Low	**£10k**		**£13.4K**	**£23.4K**
High	**£150k**		**£26.8K**	**£176.8K**
Best Estimate	**£10k**		**£17K**	**£27K**

Description and scale of key monetised costs by 'main affected groups' Maximum 5 lines

A registration scheme would require Rescue and rehoming organisations to adhere to registration conditions and pay a fee for registration, (est low £50, high £100 annual fee). Councils would be required to administer registrations, publish a register which could be achieved by publishing a pdf on website (minimal cost) or by creating an online register which register typically includes: a database, a public search page, an admin portal, authentication/security and hosting with ongoing support (est. £150k based on low numbers of organisations to be captured and potential to link in with other systems).

Other key non-monetised costs by 'main affected groups' Maximum 5 lines

This option proposed a registration scheme only, which would not require an inspection, thereby reducing the burden on council resource. There may be costs for some organisations associated with meeting registration conditions, but it is not possible to quantify these. Financial implications would be administering registrations, publishing an online register and investigating any reports of breaches.

Benefits (£m)	Total Transitional (Policy) (constant price)	Years	Average Annual (recurring) (excl. transitional) (constant price)	Total Benefit (Present Value)
Low	**Optional**		**Optional**	**Optional**
High	**Optional**		**Optional**	**Optional**
Best Estimate				

Description and scale of key monetised benefits by 'main affected groups' Maximum 5 lines

N/A

Other key non-monetised benefits by 'main affected groups' Maximum 5 lines

A Registration scheme, with public register would provide public confidence and transparency. It would create uniform standards, consistent approach to care and welfare across the sector, ensure the need for operators to strive towards ongoing compliance. It would also provide legitimacy for organisations and potentially increase donations as a result.

Key Assumptions, Sensitivities, Risks Maximum 5 lines

It is estimated that the upper number of rescue and rehoming organisations currently in operation is 68 (this is the number registered with the Charity Commission for the purposes of animal welfare, however not all of these will be rescue and rehoming organisations), and that many of these already operate at, or close to ADCH equivalent standards. For this option, without inspection, rescue and rehoming organisations would be effectively self-regulating and enforcement would be reactive as opposed to a proactive inspection. There is a risk that these organisations, caring for a number of animals are not meeting animal welfare standards and there is a reliance on public reporting concerns. Without inspection it does not provide additional safeguards.

BUSINESS ASSESSMENT (Option 2)

Direct Impact on business (Equivalent Annual) £m				
Costs:	**Benefits:**	**Net:**		

Cross Border Issues (Option)

How does this option compare to other UK regions and to other EU Member States (particularly Republic of Ireland) Maximum 3 lines
Animal welfare is a devolved matter. There is currently no regulation of rescue and rehoming organisations in England, Wales or the Republic of Ireland. Scotland is the only part of the UK that currently requires animal rescue centres to hold a licence to operate.

Summary: Analysis and Evidence — Policy Option 3

Description: Gold standard licensing scheme for rescue and rehoming organisations

ECONOMIC ASSESSMENT (Option 3)

Costs (£m)	Total Transitional (Policy) (constant price)	Years	Average Annual (recurring) (excl. transitional) (constant price)	Total Cost (Present Value)
Low	**£432k**	**1**	**£2.07M**	**£2.5M**
High	**£666.5k**		**£3.89M**	**£4.5M**
Best Estimate				

Description and scale of key monetised costs by 'main affected groups' Maximum 5 lines
This option would require rescue and rehoming organisations to obtain a licence. The licence conditions would require operators to meet the gold standard for animal welfare, resulting in additional staff costs (est £100k), increased veterinary costs (£40k), training costs (1 officer per council for 3 day training - £11k), enhanced premises (region of £20k-£50k depending on needs). Councils would be required to carry out inspections, have inspectors trained and accredited, there would be increased inspection frequency, administrative workload (estimated to take twice as long as inspection under option 4 (£80x2) £160 x 68 organisations = £10,880). The online register would also capture more information and issue reminders, payment processing (est £600k).

Other key non-monetised costs by 'main affected groups' Maximum 5 lines
This would place stringent inspection requirements on councils before issuing a licence and would therefore be more resource intensive, with additional time required for staff to process applications, inspections, reports and follow ups. Rescue and rehoming organisations would have more compliance paperwork to complete, reducing capacity to care for animals, additional time to familiarise with requirements. This could reduce capacity for rescuing more animals and may deter volunteers. They may require expert advice to assist with meeting licence conditions and inspections.

Benefits (£m)	Total Transitional (Policy) (constant price)	Years	Average Annual (recurring) (excl. transitional) (constant price)	Total Benefit (Present Value)
Low	**Optional**		**Optional**	**Optional**
High	**Optional**		**Optional**	**Optional**
Best Estimate				

Description and scale of key monetised benefits by 'main affected groups' Maximum 5 lines
N/A

Other key non-monetised benefits by 'main affected groups' Maximum 5 lines
This approach would ensure welfare standards in Northern Ireland surpass both domestic and European requirements, making them among the best globally. It would enhance rigour and transparency, guaranteeing that only legitimate organisations conduct rehoming. The public would benefit from a trusted portal, ensuring donations are secure. Councils would save on investigations and vet bills due to regular inspections and early intervention, resulting in fewer welfare prosecutions. The overall benefit is not possible to quantify.

Key Assumptions, Sensitivities, Risks Maximum 5 lines
It is estimated that the upper number of rescue and rehoming organisations currently in operation is 68 (this is the number registered with the Charity Commission for the purposes of animal welfare, however not all of these will be rescue and rehoming organisations), and that many of these already operate at, or close to ADCH equivalent standards The drawback of this option is that not all organisations in Northern Ireland will have the financial resource available to construct premises to 'gold standard'. Neither will these organisations have the operating income to sustain the required level of staff, increased licence fees and inspection frequency. Organisations in the sector have routinely approached this Department and the wider Executive for assistance to address fund raising short falls. A set of standards which are stretching or aspirational could cause several valued organisations to cease operating.

BUSINESS ASSESSMENT (Option)

Direct Impact on business (Equivalent Annual) £m				
Costs:	**Benefits:**	**Net:**		

Cross Border Issues (Option)

How does this option compare to other UK regions and to other EU Member States (particularly Republic of Ireland) Maximum 3 lines
Animal welfare is a devolved matter. There is currently no regulation of rescue and rehoming organisations in England, Wales or the Republic of Ireland. Scotland is the only part of the UK that currently requires animal rescue centres to hold a licence to operate.

Summary: Analysis and Evidence — Policy Option 4

Description: Licencing scheme for rescue and rehoming organisations (preferred option)

ECONOMIC ASSESSMENT (Option 4)

Costs (£m)	**Total Transitional (Policy)** (constant price)	Years	**Average Annual (recurring)** (excl. transitional) (constant price)	**Total Cost** (Present Value)
Low	**£34.2K**		**£35.8K**	**£70K**
High	**£213k**		**£1.38M**	**£1.59M**
Best Estimate	**£34.2K**		**£35.8K**	**£70K**

Description and scale of key monetised costs by 'main affected groups' Maximum 5 lines
The main affected groups are local councils and rescue and rehoming organisations and will be required to pay a licence fee. A broad estimate for licence fees (based on the current fees for dog breeding establishment licences) is £250. (£250 x 68 organisations = £17,000). Councils will be required to administer and enforce the licensing scheme. Therefore, staff and resources will be required to process licence applications and renewals and the associated initial and annual inspections. They will also be required to maintain and publish a public register of licensed centres and undertake enforcement action where necessary. This could be delivered by uploading a pdf online or an online register which typically includes: a database, a public search page, an admin portal, authentication/security and hosting with ongoing support (est. £100k based on low numbers of organisations to be captured and potential to link in with other systems). These costs will vary in council areas depending on the numbers of R&R organisation and staffing capacity. Those not currently operating at a satisfactory level will have costs associated with meeting the minimum welfare and operational conditions (e.g., record keeping), providing veterinary oversight and staff/ volunteer training to meet competency requirements. These costs will vary on the size of the organisation, existing standards and numbers of animals.

Other key non-monetised costs by 'main affected groups' Maximum 5 lines
There will be administrative and time burdens on both main affected groups, for rescue and rehoming organisations to submit applications, prepare for inspections, keep records updated and maintain compliance with licence conditions. This is likely to have a more significant impact on smaller rescue organisations, which may need to revise current practices and policies around the number of animals they can accept. There may be reputational damage if a rescue organisation doesn't meet licence requirements.

Benefits (£m)	**Total Transitional (Policy)** (constant price)	Years	**Average Annual (recurring)** (excl. transitional) (constant price)	**Total Benefit** (Present Value)
Low	**Optional**		**Optional**	**Optional**
High	**Optional**		**Optional**	**Optional**
Best Estimate				

Description and scale of key monetised benefits by 'main affected groups' Maximum 5 lines

Other key non-monetised benefits by 'main affected groups' Maximum 5 lines
The policy aims to improve animal welfare, therefore by ensuring consistent minimum welfare standards and regular inspections, the policy should reduce the incidence of welfare incidents, sickness and veterinary treatment. The policy will bring organisations into a statutory framework, reducing opportunities for fraudulent or commercial activity acting as a rescue.

Key Assumptions, Sensitivities, Risks Maximum 5 lines
It is estimated that the upper number of rescue and rehoming organisations currently in operation is 68 (this is the number registered with the Charity Commission for the purposes of animal welfare, however not all of these will be rescue and rehoming organisations), and that many of these already operate at, or close to ADCH equivalent standards. It is assumed that councils can apply existing animal welfare expertise to administer and enforce a licensing regime. There is a risk that the new regulation will place a burden on smaller organisations, potentially reducing rehoming capacity, or closure. Such outcomes could lead to a decrease in the overall capacity for animal rescue and rehoming in the region, possibly leaving more animals without suitable care or homes. There is a risk that licence fees may not fully offset councils' administrative and inspection costs, especially in areas with many or complex rescue and rehoming operations. Councils could be left with shortfall in income which could place additional strain on council budgets and resources, potentially affecting the quality and frequency of inspections and enforcement. Some organisations may perceive regulation as punitive, affecting sector morale and generating negative feedback, undermining the intended benefits of increased transparency, accountability, and public confidence in licensed rescue and rehoming operations. The new regulations are not meant to require a license for everyone who occasionally helps a stray or injured animal. However, if someone regularly takes in many such animals, issues may quickly develop. Even with good intentions, we believe these individuals should be licensed so that local authorities can offer guidance and step in as needed to prevent problems from becoming serious.

BUSINESS ASSESSMENT (Option)

Direct Impact on business (Equivalent Annual) £m				
Costs:	**Benefits:**	**Net:**		

Cross Border Issues (Option)

How does this option compare to other UK regions and to other EU Member States (particularly Republic of Ireland) Maximum 3 lines
Animal welfare is a devolved matter. Scotland is the only part of the UK that currently requires animal rescue centres to hold a licence to operate. The UK and Welsh Government have also announced that they will consult on introducing a licensing regime. There is currently no regulation of R&R in Republic of Ireland.

Evidence Base

Problem under consideration

Rescue and rehoming organisations in Northern Ireland are not currently subject to any statutory minimum requirements, unlike other animal-related establishments such as pet shops, dog breeding establishments, and boarding kennels, which must be inspected and licensed by local councils. Without proper rules, rogue traders, backyard breeders, and well-meaning but unqualified individuals are all putting dogs at risk of neglect, illness, and even death. The situation remains that there is nothing to deter any person or organisation establishing a rescue and rehoming centre meaning:

- Individuals without proper qualifications or knowledge may engage in these activities, potentially jeopardizing the well-being of animals under their care.
- Animal welfare can be at risk if animals are housed in inadequate facilities or poor conditions. Since rehoming is currently unregulated, some people might pose as pet sellers to avoid needing a pet shop licence.
- Additionally, there is a danger that animals brought into Northern Ireland for rehoming—legally or illegally—could introduce diseases not usually present in the region.
- It is therefore essential to maintain transparency and accountability within the sector to ensure that, should animal welfare concerns arise, those responsible receive guidance, support, or are held accountable when necessary.

The Departments Animal Welfare Pathway 2025-27 committed to examining the case for inspecting and licensing rescue and rehoming organisations.

Rationale for intervention

Although the majority of rescue and rehoming providers operate to high standards and have the best interests of animals at heart, there are no legal uniform minimum standards nor an official register of organisations operating within the sector. This regulatory gap allows anyone to establish a rescue or rehoming service without oversight, risking overcrowding, neglect and unintentional harm.

Therefore, there is an identified need to bring transparency and accountability to rescue and rehoming. Making these organisations subject to a licensing and inspection regime will deliver this and ensure that where animal welfare issues arise those responsible can be held accountable and/or be provided with advice and support to address any such issues.

Currently, Scotland is the only part of the UK that currently requires animal rescue centres to hold a licence to operate. However, the UK and Welsh Government also recognise the need for the sector to be regulated and have committed to consulting on introducing a licensing regime.

Policy objective

The overarching policy aims to protect and promote animal welfare standards across the rescue and rehoming sector. It will provide transparency, accountability, and traceability within organisations operating within Northern Ireland.

As rescue and rehoming organisations are currently unregulated, the true number of premises in operation are unknown, however as noted for the purpose of this assessment, an upper estimate of 68 is being used. There are a number of well-established and well-known charities that operate such facilities in Northern Ireland. The Northern Ireland Companion Animal Welfare Group, which requires members to meet Association of Dogs and Cats Homes standards includes:

- Assisi Animal Sanctuary
- Causeway Coast Dog Rescue
- Cats Protection
- Dogs Trust

- Mid Antrim Animal Sanctuary
- Rainbow rehoming
- Rosies Trust
- Ulster Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals

Option 1
This option would make no changes, and assumes that rescue and rehoming organisations are fulfilling their requirements under the Welfare of Animals Act 2011 (WOAA) which includes the need for the organisation to cater for the five animal welfare needs. This option does not provide additional safeguards as there would be no checks on the suitability of persons or premises, no centralised register or organisations and no increase in accountability or transparency.

Option 2
This option is a registration scheme only, which would not require an inspection, thereby reducing the burden on council resource. Financial implications would be administering registrations, publishing an online register and investigating any reports of breaches.

Option 3
This would place stringent inspection requirements on councils before issuing a licence. It would therefore be more resource intensive increasing financial impact on councils. The financial impact on rescue and rehoming organisations would be felt more acutely, as the licence conditions for this option would be much more stringent, such as potentially requiring an on site vet.

Option 4 (preferred option)

An inspection and licensing regime, using the powers in Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 (the WoAA 2011 Act) to require rescue and rehoming organisations to obtain a licence to maintain or commence operations. Under the WoAA 2011 Act, a premises must be inspected before a licence can be granted. Following consideration of thresholds for licensing in Scotland (rehoming four or more animals within a 12 month period), Animal Health Law, and proposed EU standards (requiring all organisations keeping more than 10 dogs and more than 20 cats to be inspected and placed on a publicly accessible register) this option proposes a threshold of four animals rehomed within a 12 month period. Again, taking cognisance of EU requirements and mirroring the approach taken in the Petshops (Northern Ireland) Regulations 2000 and current Scottish legislation, additional requirements around maintaining records and an annual unannounced visit by official veterinarian will also be included.

This option would mandate that the total number of animals kept for the activity at any time must not exceed the maximum that is reasonable taking into account the facilities and numbers of employed staff and volunteers on any premises on which the licensable activity is carried out.

Furthermore, it would require a sufficient number of competent staff or volunteers and training policies to be in place. The rescue and rehoming organisation must provide an environment which is suitable for the species kept and their condition, so that they can express their natural behaviours, have access to water, light and ventilation as needed. Animals must be kept in housing that minimises stress, including stress from other animals or the public. Dangerous wild animals (if held) must be kept in secure, lockable housing suitable to the species.

There would also be requirements to
- keep premises clean and disinfected to prevent diseases
- have appropriate, self-contained isolation facilities for the care of sick, injured or potentially infectious animals
- feed animals a suitable diet, provided with enrichment and not be left unattended in conditions that are likely to cause distress.
- to keep a register covering all animals held at the establishment.
- to rehome animals such as dogs, cats or horses, adverts must include a photo and, where known, the animal’s age. The licence number and issuing authority must be recorded.

- provide the person rehoming the animal with full information about care, husbandry, and veterinary care; a suitably trained person must be available to provide advice; and the prospective new keeper must be given known details of the animal (age, sex, vet history).

The drawbacks of this option include increased bureaucracy. However, it is worth noting that the sector has called for Government regulation and burdens could be minimised by ensuring that the licencing requirements match the conditions already established by ADCH.

COSTS ASSESSMENT

Option 1 – do nothing
Under this option, the public face costs of treating animals rehomed from an organisation fronting as a rescue and rehoming organisation, which wasn't ensuring welfare of animal. Veterinary costs are estimated to range from basic examination (£60) to full range of testing such as bloods, x rays, antibiotics, dressings (£200-300). Charities also bear these costs for treating animals from irresponsible rescue and rehoming organisations, with staff which have little to no training in how to care for animals. For councils' welfare issues would usually be detected later, following public reporting concerns. Councils face increased costs responding to complaints and investigating concerns. If an animal needs to be seized, there are transportation costs, kennelling costs and veterinary fees associated. The daily costs are estimated to be in the region of £15-£25 for dogs and £10-£15 for cats. It is not possible to estimate on total cost as there are no statistics available on the numbers of animals dealt with annually. Prosecution in such cases brings costs for legal fees, court time and expert reports if required. Biosecurity and disease risk is a concern, as the transfer and rehoming of animals can introduce and spread infections both among pets (and potentially to humans). This, in turn, leads to increased veterinary costs. Public trust in rescue and rehoming organisations may be undermined if welfare standards are not upheld, while the credibility of such organisations is also at stake.

Option 2 – Registration Scheme
A registration scheme would require rescue and rehoming organisations to meet specified conditions and pay an annual fee (£50-£100). Councils would manage registrations and publish a register, either as a PDF (£20k) or an online system (£150k), including a database, search page, admin portal, security, hosting, and support. Council IT costs are estimated at £20k-£200k one-time setup, plus £10k yearly maintenance and £10k-£20k in administration expenses. Recurring costs include a £50-£100 registration fee per organisation.

Option 3 – Gold standard licensing
This proposal would require rescue and rehoming organisations to obtain a licence, with conditions designed to meet the highest standards of animal welfare. Compliance would entail additional staffing costs for rescue and rehoming organisations (estimated at £100,000), increased veterinary expenses (£40,000), training for one officer per council over three days (£11,000), and improvements to premises (ranging from £20,000 to £50,000, depending on requirements). Councils would be responsible for conducting inspections, ensuring inspectors are properly trained and accredited, and increasing both inspection frequency and administrative workload (estimated to double the time required compared to Option 4, resulting in £10,880 for 68 organisations at £160 each). The online register would collect more detailed information, facilitate reminders, and handle payment processing (estimated at £600,000).

One-off costs

- Council IT system: £400,000–£600,000
- Rescue and rehoming premises upgrades: £20,000–£50,000
- Council staff training:
    - Low estimate: 1 Animal Welfare Officer × 11 councils × 3 days = £11,000
    - High estimate: 1 Animal Welfare Officer × 11 councils × 5 days = £16,500

Recurring costs

- Council inspections: £160 × 68 = £10,900 (High: £320 × 68 = £21,800)
- Council administration: £10,000–£20,000
- IT maintenance: £20,000–£40,000
- Licence fee:

    - Low: £250 × 68 = £17,000
    - High: £350 × 68 = £23,800
- Veterinary fees: £600 per organisation annually = £40,100 (High: £1,000 × 68 = £68,000)
- Additional staff:
    - One per organisation at £20,000 per annum = £1.36 million
    - Two per organisation at £20,000 per annum = £2.72 million
- Staff training:
    - Three staff per organisation, three days = £612,000
    - Three staff per organisation, five days = £1 million

Option 4 (preferred option)

Non-public sector organisations

Determining the cost of licensing for rescue and rehoming organisations that are currently unregulated is challenging. Licence fees to be charged will be set by local councils across Northern Ireland and, if based on full cost recovery, may vary from application to application. However, a broad estimate for fees (based on the current fees for dog breeding establishment licences) is £250.

£250 x 68 organisations = £17,000

A lead in time will be provided for councils and rescue and rehoming organisations to prepare for the new requirements and seek guidance to ensure meet licence standards.

We estimate the familiarisation costs (for the organisation to learn new requirements) would equate to one staff member taking two hours to learn the new regulations and requirements. Taking the average hourly rate of £12.70 and estimating 68 organisations potentially impacted:

2hrs x Average hourly wage £12.70 x 68 organisations = £1727.20

The proposed licence conditions are considered to be proportionate, so as not to place high resource burden on rescue and rehoming organisations whilst ensuring the welfare needs of the animals are being met, and providing accountability and transparency for public via the public register.

Public sector organisations

The legislation will require all rescue and rehoming organisations (rehoming more than four animals annually) to be inspected and licensed. There will therefore be a requirement on councils to consider applications and to inspect the premises associated with any application. Licenses will also periodically need renewing, and the consultation is seeking views on appropriate frequency of these. While there will clearly be a cost associated with this, the legislation would make provision for the local authority to charge a reasonable fee to cover the cost of delivering these services and accordingly the cost to the local authorities should be minimal. For the purposes of this Impact Assessment, an estimated standard cost model for an animal welfare inspection undertaken by a council Animal Welfare Officer (AWO) is set out below.

- Mid-point AWO salary (estimated)[1] £28,500 per annum
- Implied hourly rate (37 hrs/week): est. £14.80 per hour
- On-costs (employer NI, pension etc., assumed 35%): est. £5.20 per hour
- Total staff cost per hour: est. £20.00

A standard inspection case is assumed to involve approximately:

- 0.5 hours initial case handling
- hour travel (return journey)
- hour on-site inspection
- 0.5 hours post-inspection administration

[1] NJC Pay Offer 2025 - Northern Ireland.pdf

Total time per standard inspection = 3.0 hours, giving a staff cost of £60.
With an indicative mileage cost of £9 per visit and an overhead allowance of 20%, this gives a total estimated cost per standard inspection of approximately **£80** per initial inspection.

Operational costs are expected to encompass staff salaries for animal welfare officers who will be required to conduct annual inspections, as well as costs associated with administration of the licensing administration, handling reports or complaints, and the ongoing monitoring and reporting required to maintain effective oversight.

Working on the estimate that 68 rescue and rehoming organisations would be within scope (assuming even distribution across council areas, meaning each council would have to inspect and licence approx. six organisations £80x6 = £480). Councils already carry out this function for dog breeding establishments, with annual inspections. Councils will have powers to set fees and can therefore set the licence fee at a level that is cost recovering and helps them fund their services.

It is expected that one Animal Welfare Officer per council would be responsible for carrying out inspection and any associated reports / follow up action / investigations of breaches / prosecutions etc. However, councils could decide to deliver this function on a regional basis and maximise use of resources across a number of council areas.

Councils will also be required to publish a register of all licensed rescue and rehoming organisations. This could be achieved by publishing a pdf on the relevant council website, or developing IT systems for an online register with search functionality, automatic updates, online processing of applications etc.

Lowest cost option would be to publish a pdf would require staff to prepare list of licensed organisations and upload to council website review and update the list following licence renewals / suspensions / data amendments. The highest cost option would be an enhanced online system with a database, a public search page, an admin portal, authentication/security and hosting with ongoing support. The project will require full scoping, customisation, security requirements to understand true cost and ensure it meets business needs. A crude estimate, extrapolated from costs to deliver a similar system in another department, is estimated to cost in region of £100k based on low numbers of organisations to be captured and potential to link in with other systems.

DAERA
The Department will absorb costs associated with the development and implementation of the policy within business-as-usual resource. The costs include staff time to develop the policy, carry out public consultation, analyse responses, bring necessary legislation forward and develop supporting guidance for councils. No ongoing or significant operational costs are anticipated; enforcement responsibilities will sit with local councils under current arrangements in the WoAA 2011.

BENEFITS ASSESSMENT

Option 1 – do nothing
Most rescue and rehoming organisations maintain high standards and genuinely care about animal welfare. However, the lack of licensing and inspection or an official register for organisations in this sector means there is still "room for improvement."

Option 2 – Registration Scheme
A Registration scheme, with public register would provide public confidence and transparency. It would provide legitimacy for organisations and potentially increase donations as a result.

Option 3 – Gold standard licensing
The benefit of this approach is that it would meet and exceed all current domestic and European welfare standards. It would require the sector in Northern Ireland to meet cutting edge requirements and welfare standards would be amongst the best in the world. This would increase rigour, provide transparency and ensure that rehoming operations are only conducted by legitimate parties. Members of the public would have access to a portal of trusted organisations and will be reassured that any donations are going to a

reputable organisation. There would be savings for councils in terms of investigations, enforcement proceedings when a welfare issue is reported, as these should be prevented under the regular inspections and stringent requirements (vet bills and kennelling costs – est £12 per day + £60). Veterinary bills would be reduced for both councils and rescue and rehoming organisations. There would be less welfare cases requiring prosecution, due to early intervention. It is not possible to quantify the total benefit estimate.

Option 4 (preferred option)

non-public sector organisations

The regulation of registered charities not only supports the advancement of welfare standards within these organisations but also fosters enhanced accountability and transparency for those which raise funds from the public. Therefore, public confidence in licensed rescue and rehoming organisations will be increased; and may potentially increase financial contributions towards supporting their work.

Public sector organisations

For councils, bringing rescue and rehoming organisations fills a regulatory gap and will assist in delivering their animal welfare responsibilities. Having a list of licensed organisations, will make it easier to identify non-compliance, saving resources on investigation and improving public confidence. In the absence of adequate, consistent and targeted regulation, local councils (as the enforcement body) are often constrained in their ability to intervene where needed.

DAERA

The benefits of this option include that the legislation would align with AHL and EU requirements and requirements could be aligned with established and accepted good practice already contained in the ADCH guidelines. Would increase rigour, provide transparency and ensure that rehoming operations are only conducted by legitimate parties.

Public

The general public will be assured and confident that they are rehoming an animal from a legitimate rescue and rehoming organisation. Those who provide donations to these organisations can also be confident that they are funding a legitimate and officially licenced rescue and rehoming organisation.

Benefits > Costs

Benefits

The overarching objective is to improve animal welfare. Regulation will help to protect vulnerable animals and ensure that minimum, consistent, standards are being met. This will also support biosecurity and disease control and should therefore result in less animals requiring veterinary attention.

Whilst option two has lowest cost for implementation, it relies on self-regulation by rescue and rehoming organisations and reactive enforcement based on public reporting. This approach lacks inspections and therefore does not offer additional safeguards, leaving animal welfare standards at risk. Option three, while setting ambitious "gold standard" requirements could financially overwhelm many organisations, potentially forcing valued groups to cease operations due to unsustainable staffing, licensing, and inspection demands. Option four, the preferred option, introduces licensing for individuals who regularly take in multiple animals, allowing local authorities to provide guidance and intervene, when necessary, thus preventing minor issues from escalating.

Although a licensing regime is slightly more expensive than registration, it strikes a balance between affordability and effective oversight. Licensing organisations who rehome more than four animals within a 12-month period enables authorities to support and monitor, ensuring animal welfare needs are properly met. This approach is proportionate, addressing the risks associated with unregulated care without imposing excessive financial burdens on organisations. Ultimately, option four is necessary to safeguard animal welfare, offering a practical solution that meets regulatory requirements without the drawbacks of under-regulation or unattainable standards.

Charities that are already operating at a high standard will be relatively unaffected by the regulations; rather, regulation will help to highlight organisations that do not meet established standards. Therefore, regulation plays a valuable role in encouraging accountability, transparency, and trust from the public.

Regulation will prevent rogue traders, puppy farms and puppy smugglers who set up a rehoming organisation as a front for their business. Additionally, concerns exist about people who, without proper training or resources, adopt displaced animals by keeping them at home when they cannot provide adequate care.

Appendix 1 - Rural Needs Impact Assessment (RNIA) Template

SECTION 1 - Defining the activity subject to Section 1(1) of the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016

1A. Name of Public Authority.

Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (The Department)

1B. Please provide a short title which describes the activity being undertaken by the Public Authority that is subject to Section 1(1) of the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016.

Proposal to introduce regulations for the licensing and inspection of Rescue and Rehoming Organisations.

1C. Please indicate which category the activity specified in Section 1B above relates to.

Developing a	Policy	X	Strategy		Plan	
Adopting a	Policy		Strategy		Plan	
Implementing a	Policy		Strategy		Plan	
Revising a	Policy		Strategy		Plan	
Designing a Public Service						
Delivering a Public Service						

1D. Please provide the official title (if any) of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service document or initiative relating to the category indicated in Section 1C above.

Introduction of a statutory licensing and inspection regime for rescue and rehoming organisations.

1E. Please provide details of the aims and/or objectives of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service.

The overarching policy aims to protect and promote animal welfare standards across the rescue and rehoming sector. It will introduce statutory minimum standards, inspections and licensing of rescue and rehoming organisations to:

- Protect and promote animal welfare;
- Ensure transparency, accountability and traceability; and
- Deter rogue operators.

1F. What definition of 'rural' is the Public Authority using in respect of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service?	
Population Settlements of less than 5,000 (Default definition).	X
Other Definition (Provide details and the rationale below).	
A definition of 'rural' is not applicable.	

Details of alternative definition of 'rural' used.

N/A

Rationale for using alternative definition of 'rural'.

N/A

Reasons why a definition of 'rural' is not applicable.

N/A

SECTION 2 - Understanding the impact of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service

2A. Is the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service likely to impact on people in rural areas?

Yes [X] No [ ] If the response is **NO** GO TO Section **2E**.

2B. Please explain how the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is likely to impact on people in rural areas.

The Department proposes to introduce a licensing regime for rescue and rehoming organisations to protect the welfare of animals, increase transparency and accountability as well as deterring businesses who claim to be rescue and rehoming organisations.

Rescue and rehoming organisations are more likely to operate in rural areas and will be reliant on community volunteers and seek access to veterinary services. However, these are impacts felt by the organisations already and the proposed regulation should not place new, undue burdens on them. Inspections, which will be carried out in advance of a licence being granted will provide the organisations with the opportunity to seek guidance and take steps to prevent potential animal welfare issues. Regulation could increase public confidence in the organisations and may see patronage increased as a result donation.

The Department has carried out a Regulatory Impact Assessment which provides details on the costs/benefits analysis to industry.

2C. If the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is likely to impact on people in rural areas *differently* from people in urban areas, please explain how it is likely to impact on people in rural areas differently.

The policy will be applied equally across all areas of Northern Ireland; it will not impact rescue and rehoming organisations based in rural areas differently. The proposal is designed to be proportionate ensuring animal welfare whilst not placing significant burdens on organisations which could result in their closure. If this was to occur in a rural area it could create gap in provision.

The Department will seek views through public consultation to better understand the potential impacts on rural organisations and ensure that any regulatory framework is proportionate and does not unintentionally disadvantage rural stakeholders.

2D. Please indicate which of the following rural policy areas the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is likely to primarily impact on.

Rural Businesses	X
Rural Tourism	
Rural Housing	
Jobs or Employment in Rural Areas	X
Education or Training in Rural Areas	X
Broadband or Mobile Communications in Rural Areas	
Transport Services or Infrastructure in Rural Areas	
Health or Social Care Services in Rural Areas	
Poverty in Rural Areas	
Deprivation in Rural Areas	
Rural Crime or Community Safety	
Rural Development	
Agri-Environment	
Other (Please state)	

If the response to Section 2A was YES GO TO Section 3A.

2E. Please explain why the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is NOT likely to impact on people in rural areas.

N/A

SECTION 3 - Identifying the Social and Economic Needs of Persons in Rural Areas

3A. Has the Public Authority taken steps to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas that are relevant to the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service?

Yes [X] No [ ] If the response is **NO** GO TO Section **3E**.

3B. Please indicate which of the following methods or information sources were used by the Public Authority to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas.

Consultation with Rural Stakeholders	[ ]	Published Statistics	[ ]
Consultation with Other Organisations	[ ]	Research Papers	[ ]
Surveys or Questionnaires	[ ]	Other Publications	[ ]
Other Methods or Information Sources (include details in Question 3C below).			[X]

3C. Please provide details of the methods and information sources used to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas including relevant dates, names of organisations, titles of publications, website references, details of surveys or consultations undertaken etc.

The Department does not hold information on rescue and rehoming organisations. Animal welfare stakeholders have called for regulation of the sector, in particular, Northern Ireland Companion Animal Welfare Group, which consists of eight member organisations from a range of geographical locations across Northern Ireland highlighted the need for regulation at meeting with Minister Muir in 2024.

There was analysis of regulation of rescue and rehoming organisations in Scotland[1] , EU proposed legislation on the Welfare of Dogs and Cats and their traceability[2] .

Responses to Scottish consultation from 2021 have also been considered in relation to rural needs identified. The Department is undertaking a public consultation on its proposals for regulation of rescue and rehoming organisations. Feedback received from the consultation will inform its final proposals.

1. The Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (Scotland) Regulations 2021
2. EUR-Lex - 52023PC0769 - EN - EUR-Lex

3D. Please provide details of the social and economic needs of people in rural areas which have been identified by the Public Authority?

In developing its policy, the Department has identified the social and economic needs of people in rural areas.

The economic needs relate to financial sustainability of rescue and rehoming organisations. Whilst these organisations may incur higher costs to access veterinary services, the proposal requires a veterinarian to make a visit annually, to advise the organisation on animal welfare. There is therefore no requirement to bring animals to a vet, which for organisations in rural locations, may be more difficult and costly. The social needs relate to volunteer-led delivery of services, which there may be more of a reliance on for smaller organisations.

These factors may affect their ability to comply with the new regulatory requirements and may increase administrative and financial pressures they face compared with organisations in urban areas. However, regulating these organisations will increase public trust that they are accountable and transparent in their operations and may therefore increase donations and public support.

If the response to Section 3A was YES GO TO Section 4A.

3E. Please explain why no steps were taken by the Public Authority to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas?

N/A

SECTION 4 - Considering the Social and Economic Needs of Persons in Rural Areas

4A. Please provide details of the issues considered in relation to the social and economic needs of people in rural areas.

This policy will promote animal welfare across all Northern Ireland, both in urban and rural areas.

Economic

- For many rural rescues, limited staffing, volunteer dependence and constrained financial resources could make compliance more challenging. As a result, a key concern is that some organisations may scale back their activities or close completely if regulatory requirements prove too resource intensive.
- Consideration has been given to ensuring that any regulatory framework is proportionate and does not impose unnecessary burdens on smaller or rural organisations. In reviewing the potential impacts, particular attention was paid to how rural organisations may experience the changes differently from those in urban areas.
- Animal Welfare Organisations have, been calling for some time for regulation of rescue and rehoming organisations.
- The proposals will ensure the welfare needs of the animals, deter rogue operators from presenting as a rescue and rehoming organisation and provide legitimacy to those currently in operation and which are already fulfilling all the animal's needs.

Social

- Organisations based in rural locations may rely more heavily on volunteers to deliver their services.
- Licensing will provide assurance to the public that the organisation is transparent and accountable and may stimulate interest from new volunteers.

The Department will seek views through public consultation to better understand the potential impacts on rural organisations and ensure that any regulatory framework is proportionate and does not unintentionally disadvantage rural stakeholders.

SECTION 5 - Influencing the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service

5A. Has the development, adoption, implementation or revising of the Policy, Strategy or Plan, or the design or delivery of the Public Service, been influenced by the rural needs identified?

Yes [X] No [ ] If the response is NO GO TO Section 5C.

5B. Please explain how the development, adoption, implementation or revising of the Policy, Strategy or Plan, or the design or delivery of the Public Service, has been influenced by the rural needs identified.

The key driver for the policy is to protect animal welfare, increasing transparency and accountability within the sector, deter rogue operators (businesses fronting as a rescue and rehoming charity).

The policy has been designed to be balanced to deliver these wider benefits whilst minimizing, where it is possible and appropriate, the impacts which may arise for organisations. For example, when considering what organisations are within scope, the number of animals being rehomed was a driving factor, to ensure that smaller organisations are not unnecessarily captured within the regulatory framework. These thresholds were included specifically to avoid placing disproportionate requirements on small or rural rescues operating with limited resources.

The Department also recognises the need to support all rescue and rehoming organisations, including those in rural areas, in transitioning to any new licensing and inspection requirements. Councils will be responsible for enforcing the new requirements and the Department will work closely with to provide of clear guidance and stakeholder engagement.

The Department will also use the public consultation to gather further evidence on rural impacts and consider whether additional mitigations or support measures are required.

If the response to Section 5A was YES GO TO Section 6A.

5C. Please explain why the development, adoption, implementation or revising of the Policy, Strategy or Plan, or the design or the delivery of the Public Service, has NOT been influenced by the rural needs identified.
.N/A

SECTION 6 – Documenting and Recording

6A. Please tick below to confirm that the RNIA Template will be retained by the Public Authority and relevant information on the Section 1 activity compiled in accordance with paragraph 6.7 of the guidance.	
I confirm that the RNIA Template will be retained and relevant information compiled.	X

Rural Needs Impact Assessment undertaken by:	Colin Stewart
Position/Grade:	Staff Officer
Division/Branch	Animal Welfare and Dog Control Policy Branch
Signature:	Colin Stewart
Date:	23/03/26
Rural Needs Impact Assessment approved by:	Catherine Goligher
Position/Grade:	Grade 7
Division/Branch:	Animal Welfare and Dog Control Policy Branch
Signature:	Catherine Goligher
Date:	14 April 2026

Equality & Disability Duties Screening Template

December 2023 version

Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs
www.daera-ni.gov.uk

An Roinn Talmhaíochta, Comhshaoil agus Gnóthaí Tuaithe

Depairtment o' Fairmin, Environment an' Kintra Matthers

Screening flowchart and template (taken from Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 - A Guide for public authorities April 2010 (Appendix 1)).

Introduction

Part 1. Policy scoping – asks public authorities to provide details about the policy, procedure, practice and/or decision being screened and what available evidence you have gathered to help make an assessment of the likely impact on equality of opportunity and good relations.

Part 2. Screening questions – asks about the extent of the likely impact of the policy on groups of people within each of the Section 75 categories. Details of the groups consulted and the level of assessment of the likely impact. This includes consideration of multiple identity and good relations issues. This section also includes two questions related to the Disability Duties.

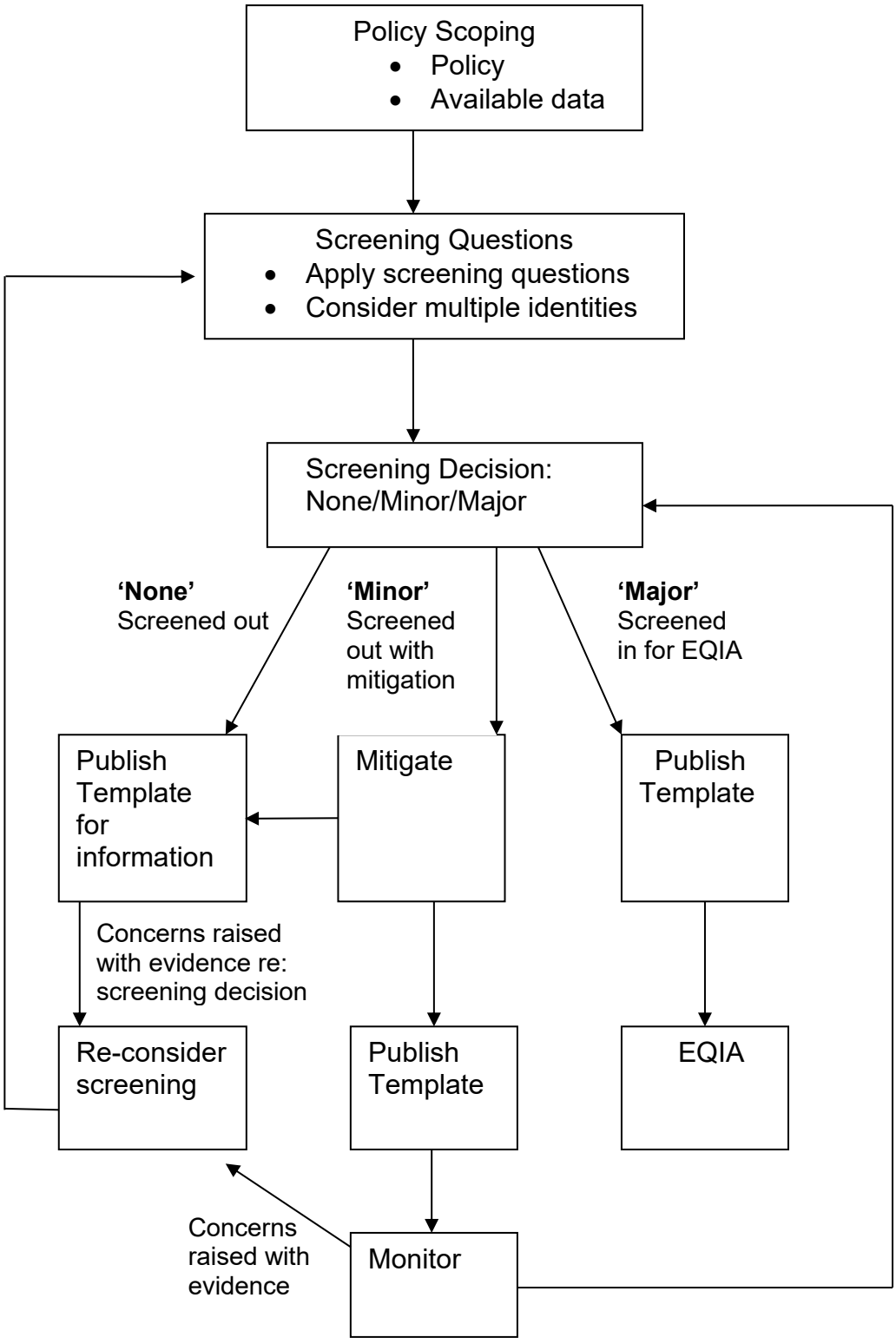
Part 3. Screening decision – guides the public authority to reach a screening decision as to whether or not there is a need to carry out an equality impact assessment (EQIA), or to introduce measures to mitigate the likely impact, or the introduction of an alternative policy to better promote equality of opportunity and/or good relations.

Part 4. Monitoring – provides guidance to public authorities on monitoring for adverse impact and broader monitoring.

Part 5. Consideration of Human Rights – please note this is not a Human Rights Screening form but rather a prompt that impacts on Human Rights should be considered.

Part 6. Approval and authorisation – verifies the public authority's approval of a screening decision by a senior manager responsible for the policy.

A screening flowchart is provided below.



Part 1. Policy scoping

The first stage of the screening process involves scoping the policy under consideration. The purpose of policy scoping is to help prepare the background and context and set out the aims and objectives for the policy, being screened. At this stage, scoping the policy will help identify potential constraints as well as opportunities and will help the policy maker work through the screening process on a step by step basis.

Public authorities should remember that the Section 75 statutory duties apply to internal policies (relating to people who work for the authority), as well as external policies (relating to those who are, or could be, served by the authority).

Information about the policy

Name of the policy

Proposal to introduce regulation of rescue and rehoming organisations in Northern Ireland

Is this an existing, revised or new policy?

New policy

What is it trying to achieve? (intended aims/outcomes)

The policy aims to introduce a statutory licensing and inspection regime for rescue and rehoming organisations in Northern Ireland to ensure consistent minimum welfare standards, improve transparency and accountability, and align with EU Animal Health Law requirements and emerging European legislation.

Currently there are no statutory minimum standards or formal oversight mechanisms for the sector, meaning any individual or organisation can establish a rescue or rehoming operation without inspection or licensing, and there is no central register of operators.

The intended outcome is to safeguard animal welfare, improve public confidence and ensure that organisations operate to appropriate and consistent standards, while helping to deter unqualified operators, poor quality premises and the misuse of “rescue” status to avoid pet-selling regulations.

Are there any Section 75 categories which might be expected to benefit from the intended policy? ☐ Yes ☒ No (select as appropriate)

If so, explain how.

Who initiated or wrote the policy?

The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs.

Who owns and who implements the policy?

The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs owns the policy and legislation, local councils implement the legislation.

Implementation factors

Are there any factors which could contribute to/detract from the intended aim/outcome of the policy/decision? ☐ Yes ☒ No (select as appropriate)

If yes, are they (please select as appropriate)

Financial ☐

Legislative ☐

other, please specify:

Main stakeholders affected

Who are the internal and external stakeholders (actual or potential) that the policy will impact upon? (please select as appropriate)

Staff ☐

Service users ☒

Other public sector organisations ☒

Voluntary/community/trade unions ☒

Other, please specify

In terms of public sector organisations impacted, councils are responsible for enforcement in relation to non-farmed animals under the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011. Enforcement would therefore fall to councils. Rescue and rehoming organisations, as charitable animal welfare organisations will be required to obtain a licence, pay the associated fee and comply with licensing requirements. Members of the public will be impacted

positively as the transparency and accountability required by licensing will improve public trust and confidence in rehoming an animal.

Other policies with a bearing on this policy

What are they?

N/A

Who owns them?

N/A

Available evidence

Evidence to help inform the screening process may take many forms. Public authorities should ensure that their screening decision is informed by relevant data. The Commission has produced this guide to signpost to S75 data.

What evidence/information (both qualitative and quantitative) have you gathered to inform this policy? Specify details for each of the Section 75 categories.

Please ensure all data used is the most current and up to date available. You should verify this by contacting the Departmental Statisticians.

Religious belief evidence/information:

There is no evidence to suggest that the revised policy will impact negatively on people in this category. Northern Ireland's 2021 Census shows Catholics as the largest religious group (42.31%), followed by Presbyterians (16.61%), Church of Ireland (11.55%) and Methodists (2.35%), with others identifying as

other Christians (6.85%), other religions (1.34%), no religion (17.39%), or not stating a religion (1.60%).
There is no data available on the number of rescue and rehoming organisations are currently in operation in Northern Ireland. Sixty-eight organisations are currently registered with the Charity Commission website for the purposes of animal welfare. Whilst it is not expected that all of these are rescue and rehoming organisations, 68 is being used as an upper estimate of the number which may be in operation currently.
The upcoming public consultation will allow both individuals and organisations to share their perspectives. Any matters pertaining to religious beliefs that arise during the consultation will be thoroughly evaluated when determining the final policy proposal.

Political Opinion evidence/information:

There is no evidence to suggest that the revised policy will impact negatively on people in this category.
The 2024 NI Life & Times survey shows the political outlook in Northern Ireland, with 30% identifying as unionist, 30% as nationalist, and the largest share (35%) identifying as neither, while small minorities selected another answer (2%) or said they did not know (3%).
There is no data available on the number of rescue and rehoming organisations are currently in operation in Northern Ireland. Sixty-eight organisations are currently registered with the Charity Commission website for the purposes of animal welfare. Whilst it is not expected that all of these are rescue and rehoming organisations, 68 is being used as an upper estimate of the number which may be in operation currently.
The upcoming public consultation will allow both individuals and organisations to share their perspectives. Any matters pertaining to political opinion that

arise during the consultation will be thoroughly evaluated when determining the final policy proposal.

Racial Group evidence/information:

There is no evidence to suggest that the revised policy will impact negatively on people in this category.
Northern Ireland's 2021 Census shows a population of approximately 97% identifying as White, while minority ethnic groups together account for about 3% of the population; the largest of these are Indian and Chinese communities (around 0.5% each), Mixed ethnicities (0.8%), and Black ethnic groups (around 0.6%).
There is no data available on the number of rescue and rehoming organisations are currently in operation in Northern Ireland. Sixty-eight organisations are currently registered with the Charity Commission website for the purposes of animal welfare. Whilst it is not expected that all of these are rescue and rehoming organisations, 68 is being used as an upper estimate of the number which may be in operation currently.
The upcoming public consultation will allow both individuals and organisations to share their perspectives. Any matters pertaining to race that arise during the consultation will be thoroughly evaluated when determining the final policy proposal.

Age evidence/information:

There is no evidence to suggest that the revised policy will impact negatively on people in this category.
Based on Northern Ireland's Census 2021, the population age profile can be summarised as follows: 25.14% of the population are aged 0–19 years, 25.28% are 20–39 years, 26.48% are 40–59 years, 18.73% are 60–79 years,

and 4.37% are aged 80 years and over, illustrating a broadly even distribution across the working-age groups with a smaller proportion in the oldest age category.
There is no data available on the number of rescue and rehoming organisations are currently in operation in Northern Ireland. Sixty-eight organisations are currently registered with the Charity Commission website for the purposes of animal welfare. Whilst it is not expected that all of these are rescue and rehoming organisations, 68 is being used as an upper estimate of the number which may be in operation currently.
The upcoming public consultation will allow both individuals and organisations to share their perspectives. Any matters pertaining to age that arise during the consultation will be thoroughly evaluated when determining the final policy proposal.

Marital Status evidence/information:

There is no evidence to suggest that the revised policy will impact negatively on people in this category.
Northern Ireland's Census 2021 shows that 45.59% of the population are married, while 38.07% are single (never married or never in a civil partnership); smaller proportions are divorced (6.02%), widowed or surviving a civil partner (6.36%), separated (3.78%), and in a civil partnership (0.18%).
There is no data available on the number of rescue and rehoming organisations are currently in operation in Northern Ireland. Sixty-eight organisations are currently registered with the Charity Commission website for the purposes of animal welfare. Whilst it is not expected that all of these are rescue and rehoming organisations, 68 is being used as an upper estimate of the number which may be in operation currently.

The upcoming public consultation will allow both individuals and organisations to share their perspectives. Any matters pertaining to marital status that arise during the consultation will be thoroughly evaluated when determining the final policy proposal.

Sexual Orientation evidence/information:

There is no evidence to suggest that the revised policy will impact negatively on people in this category.

Northern Ireland's Census 2021 shows that the vast majority of the population identify as straight or heterosexual (90.04%), while 2.09% identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or another sexual orientation, and 7.87% either preferred not to say or did not state their sexual orientation.

There is no data available on the number of rescue and rehoming organisations are currently in operation in Northern Ireland. Sixty-eight organisations are currently registered with the Charity Commission website for the purposes of animal welfare. Whilst it is not expected that all of these are rescue and rehoming organisations, 68 is being used as an upper estimate of the number which may be in operation currently.

The upcoming public consultation will allow both individuals and organisations to share their perspectives. Any matters pertaining to sexual orientation that arise during the consultation will be thoroughly evaluated when determining the final policy proposal.

Men & Women generally evidence/information:

There is no evidence to suggest that the revised policy will impact negatively on people in this category.

Northern Ireland's Census 2021 shows that the population is almost evenly split by sex, with females accounting for 50.81% of the population and males 49.19%.
There is no data available on the number of rescue and rehoming organisations are currently in operation in Northern Ireland. Sixty-eight organisations are currently registered with the Charity Commission website for the purposes of animal welfare. Whilst it is not expected that all of these are rescue and rehoming organisations, 68 is being used as an upper estimate of the number which may be in operation currently.
The upcoming public consultation will allow both individuals and organisations to share their perspectives. Any matters pertaining to gender that arise during the consultation will be thoroughly evaluated when determining the final policy proposal.

Disability evidence/information:

There is no evidence to suggest that the revised policy will impact negatively on people in this category.
Northern Ireland's Census 2021 shows that 55.14% of households have no residents with a limiting long-term health problem or disability, while 33.63% have one resident with a limiting condition and 11.23% have two or more residents.
There is no data available on the number of rescue and rehoming organisations are currently in operation in Northern Ireland. Sixty-eight organisations are currently registered with the Charity Commission website for the purposes of animal welfare. Whilst it is not expected that all of these are rescue and rehoming organisations, 68 is being used as an upper estimate of the number which may be in operation currently.

The upcoming public consultation will allow both individuals and organisations to share their perspectives. Any matters pertaining to disability that arise during the consultation will be thoroughly evaluated and potential mitigations considered and included in final policy as necessary when determining the final policy proposal.

Dependants evidence/information:

There is no evidence to suggest that the revised policy will impact negatively on people in this category.

Northern Ireland's Census 2021 shows that just over half of households (53.15%) have no children, with a further 16.17% having no dependent children, meaning around seven in ten households do not include dependent children, while around 30% do; among those with dependent children, households most commonly have one or two children, and larger families are relatively rare, with around 6–7% of households having three or more dependent children.

There is no data available on the number of rescue and rehoming organisations are currently in operation in Northern Ireland. Sixty-eight organisations are currently registered with the Charity Commission website for the purposes of animal welfare. Whilst it is not expected that all of these are rescue and rehoming organisations, 68 is being used as an upper estimate of the number which may be in operation currently.

The upcoming public consultation will allow both individuals and organisations to share their perspectives. Any matters pertaining to dependants that arise during the consultation will be thoroughly evaluated when determining the final policy proposal.

Needs, experiences and priorities

Taking into account the information referred to above, what are the different needs, experiences and priorities of each of the following categories, in relation to the particular policy/decision?

Specify details of the needs, experiences and priorities for each of the Section 75 categories below:

Religious belief

At present there is no evidence of needs, experience and priorities between religious belief and the statutory licensing and inspection of rescue and rehoming organisations, but the consultation may highlight something which needs to be considered.

Political Opinion

At present there is no evidence of needs, experience and priorities between political opinion and the statutory licensing and inspection of rescue and rehoming organisations, but the consultation may highlight something which needs to be considered.

Racial Group

At present there is no evidence of needs, experience and priorities between race and the statutory licensing and inspection of rescue and rehoming organisations, but the consultation may highlight something which needs to be considered.

Age

At present there is no evidence of needs, experience and priorities between age and the statutory licensing and inspection of rescue and rehoming organisations, but the consultation may highlight something which needs to be considered.

Marital status

At present there is no evidence of needs, experience and priorities between marital status and the statutory licensing and inspection of rescue and rehoming organisations, but the consultation may highlight something which needs to be considered.

Sexual orientation

At present there is no evidence of needs, experience and priorities between sexual orientation and the statutory licensing and inspection of rescue and rehoming organisations, but the consultation may highlight something which needs to be considered.

Men and Women Generally

At present there is no evidence of needs, experience and priorities between gender and the statutory licensing and inspection of rescue and rehoming organisations, but the consultation may highlight something which needs to be considered.

Disability

At present there is no evidence of needs, experience and priorities between disability and the statutory licensing and inspection of rescue and rehoming organisations, but the consultation may highlight something which needs to be considered.

Dependants

At present there is no evidence of needs, experience and priorities between dependents and the statutory licensing and inspection of rescue and rehoming organisations, but the consultation may highlight something which needs to be considered.

Introduction

In making a decision as to whether or not there is a need to carry out an equality impact assessment, the public authority should consider its answers to the questions 1-4.

If the public authority's conclusion is **none** in respect of all of the Section 75 equality of opportunity and/or good relations categories, then the public authority may decide to screen the policy out. If a policy is 'screened out' as having no relevance to equality of opportunity or good relations, a public authority should give details of the reasons for the decision taken.

If the public authority's conclusion is **major** in respect of one or more of the Section 75 equality of opportunity and/or good relations categories, then consideration should be given to subjecting the policy to the equality impact assessment procedure.

If the public authority's conclusion is **minor** in respect of one or more of the Section 75 equality categories and/or good relations categories, then consideration should still be given to proceeding with an equality impact assessment, or to:

- measures to mitigate the adverse impact; or

- the introduction of an alternative policy to better promote equality of opportunity and/or good relations.

In favour of a 'major' impact

a) The policy is significant in terms of its strategic importance;
b) Potential equality impacts are unknown, because, for example, there is insufficient data upon which to make an assessment or because they are complex, and it would be appropriate to conduct an equality impact assessment in order to better assess them;
c) Potential equality and/or good relations impacts are likely to be adverse or are likely to be experienced disproportionately by groups of people including those who are marginalised or disadvantaged;
d) Further assessment offers a valuable way to examine the evidence and develop recommendations in respect of a policy about which there are concerns amongst affected individuals and representative groups, for example in respect of multiple identities;
e) The policy is likely to be challenged by way of judicial review;
f) The policy is significant in terms of expenditure.

In favour of 'minor' impact

a) The policy is not unlawfully discriminatory and any residual potential impacts on people are judged to be negligible;
b) The policy, or certain proposals within it, are potentially unlawfully discriminatory, but this possibility can readily and easily be eliminated by making appropriate changes to the policy or by adopting appropriate mitigating measures;

c) Any asymmetrical equality impacts caused by the policy are intentional because they are specifically designed to promote equality of opportunity for particular groups of disadvantaged people;
d) By amending the policy there are better opportunities to better promote equality of opportunity and/or good relations.

In favour of none

1) The policy has no relevance to equality of opportunity or good relations.
2) The policy is purely technical in nature and will have no bearing in terms of its likely impact on equality of opportunity or good relations for people within the equality and good relations categories.

Taking into account the evidence presented above, consider and comment on the likely impact on equality of opportunity and good relations for those affected by this policy, in any way, for each of the equality and good relations categories, by applying the screening questions given overleaf and indicate the level of impact on the group i.e. minor, major or none.

Screening questions

1. **What is the likely impact on equality of opportunity for those affected by this policy, for each of the Section 75 equality categories?** Please provide details of the likely policy impacts and determine the level of impact for each S75 categories below i.e. either minor, major or none.

   Details of the likely policy impacts on *Religious belief*:

None – All rescue and rehoming organisations regardless of religious belief will be required to meet requirements regarding statutory licensing. Local councils will be required to administer and enforce the licensing regime, regardless of religious belief.

What is the level of impact? Minor ☐ Major ☐ None ☒
(select as appropriate)

Details of the likely policy impacts on *Political Opinion:*

None – All rescue and rehoming organisations regardless of political opinion will be required to meet requirements regarding statutory licensing. Local councils will be required to administer and enforce the licensing regime, regardless of religious belief.

What is the level of impact? Minor ☐ Major ☐ None ☒
(select as appropriate)

Details of the likely policy impacts on *Racial Group*:

None – All rescue and rehoming organisations regardless of race will be required to meet requirements regarding statutory licensing. Local councils will be required to administer and enforce the licensing regime, regardless of religious belief.

What is the level of impact? Minor ☐ Major ☐ None ☒
(select as appropriate)

Details of the likely policy impacts on *Age*:

None – All rescue and rehoming organisations regardless of age will be required to meet requirements regarding statutory licensing. Local councils will be required to administer and enforce the licensing regime, regardless of religious belief.

What is the level of impact? Minor ☐ Major ☐ None ☒
(select as appropriate)

Details of the likely policy impacts on *Marital Status*:

None – All rescue and rehoming organisations regardless of marital status will be required to meet requirements regarding statutory licensing. Local councils will be required to administer and enforce the licensing regime, regardless of religious belief.

What is the level of impact? Minor ☐ Major ☐ None ☒
(select as appropriate)

Details of the likely policy impacts on *Sexual Orientation*:

None – All rescue and rehoming organisations regardless of sexual orientation will be required to meet requirements regarding statutory licensing. Local councils will be required to administer and enforce the licensing regime, regardless of religious belief.

What is the level of impact Minor ☐ Major ☐ None ☒
(select as appropriate)

Details of the likely policy impacts on *Men and Women*:

None – All rescue and rehoming organisations regardless of gender will be required to meet requirements regarding statutory licensing. Local councils will be required to administer and enforce the licensing regime, regardless of religious belief.

What is the level of impact? Minor ☐ Major ☐ None ☒
(select as appropriate)

Details of the likely policy impacts on *Disability*:

None – All rescue and rehoming organisations regardless of disability will be required to meet requirements regarding statutory licensing. We have not identified any disability groups that would be more intensely affected by the new policy. Should any be identified through consultation, the needs will be considered and mitigations and support built into the policy/ guidance where appropriate. Local councils will be required to administer and enforce the licensing regime, regardless of religious belief.

What is the level of impact? Minor ☐ Major ☐ None ☒
(select as appropriate)

Details of the likely policy impacts on *Dependants*:

None – All rescue and rehoming organisations regardless of dependents will be required to meet requirements regarding statutory licensing. Local councils will be required to administer and enforce the licensing regime, regardless of religious belief.

What is the level of impact? ☐ Major ☐ None ☒
(select as appropriate)

2. **Are there opportunities to better promote equality of opportunity for people within the Section 75 equalities categories?**

☐ Yes ☒ No (select as appropriate)

Detail opportunities of how this policy could promote equality of opportunity for people within each of the Section 75 Categories below:

Religious Belief **- If Yes, provide details:**

N/A

If No, provide reasons:

There is no impact envisaged on, or opportunity to promote equality of opportunity for people within this category. However, the proposed reforms will be subject to a public consultation, and the responses to the consultation will be monitored to inform the position.

Political Opinion **- If Yes, provide details:**

N/A

If No, provide reasons:

There is no impact envisaged on, or opportunity to promote equality of opportunity for people within this category. However, the proposed reforms will be subject to a public consultation, and the responses to the consultation will be monitored to inform the position.

Racial Group **- If Yes, provide details:**

N/A

If No, provide reasons:

There is no impact envisaged on, or opportunity to promote equality of opportunity for people within this category. However, the proposed reforms will be subject to a public consultation, and the responses to the consultation will be monitored to inform the position.

Age **- If Yes, provide details:**

N/A

If No, provide reasons:

There is no impact envisaged on, or opportunity to promote equality of opportunity for people within this category. However, the proposed reforms will be subject to a public consultation, and the responses to the consultation will be monitored to inform the position.

Marital Status **- If Yes, provide details:**

N/A

If No, provide reasons

There is no impact envisaged on, or opportunity to promote equality of opportunity for people within this category. However, the proposed reforms will be subject to a public consultation, and the responses to the consultation will be monitored to inform the position.

Sexual Orientation **- If Yes, provide details:**

N/A

If No, provide reasons:

There is no impact envisaged on, or opportunity to promote equality of opportunity for people within this category. However, the proposed reforms will be subject to a public consultation, and the responses to the consultation will be monitored to inform the position.

Men and Women generally **- If Yes, provide details:**

N/A

If No, provide reasons:

There is no impact envisaged on, or opportunity to promote equality of opportunity for people within this category. However, the proposed reforms will be subject to a public consultation, and the responses to the consultation will be monitored to inform the position.

Disability **- If Yes, provide details:**

N/A

If No, provide reasons:

There is no impact envisaged on, or opportunity to promote equality of opportunity for people within this category. However, the proposed reforms will be subject to a public consultation, and the responses to the consultation will be monitored to inform the position.

Dependants **- If Yes, provide details:**

N/A

If No, provide reasons:

There is no impact envisaged on, or opportunity to promote equality of opportunity for people within this category. However, the proposed reforms will be subject to a public consultation, and the responses to the consultation will be monitored to inform the position.

3. **To what extent is the policy likely to impact on good relations between people of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group?**

Please provide details of the likely policy impact and determine the level of impact for each of the categories below i.e. either minor, major or none.

Details of the likely policy impacts on *Religious belief*:

None - All rescue and rehoming organisations regardless of religious belief will be impacted equally with statutory licensing and inspections as no evidence suggests any religious group will be impacted due to religious beliefs.

What is the level of impact? Minor ☐ Major ☐ None ☒
(select as appropriate)

Details of the likely policy impacts on *Political Opinion*:

None - All rescue and rehoming organisations regardless of political opinion will be impacted equally with statutory licensing and inspections

as no evidence suggests any political group will be impacted due to political opinion.

What is the level of impact? Minor ☐ Major ☐ None ☒
(select as appropriate)

Details of the likely policy impacts on *Racial Group*:

None - All rescue and rehoming organisations regardless of race will be impacted equally with statutory licensing and inspections as no evidence suggests any racial group will be impacted due to race.

What is the level of impact? Minor ☐ Major ☐ None ☒
(select as appropriate)

4. **Are there opportunities to better promote good relations between people of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group?**

Detail opportunities of how this policy could better promote good relations for people within each of the Section 75 Categories below:

***Religious Belief* - If Yes, provide details:**

N/A

If No, provide reasons:

The Department has not identified any evidence to indicate such opportunities. However, the responses to the consultation will be monitored to inform the position.

Political Opinion **- If Yes, provide details:**

N/A

If No, provide reasons:

The Department has not identified any evidence to indicate such opportunities. However, the responses to the consultation will be monitored to inform the position.

Racial Group **- If Yes, provide details:**

N/A

If No, provide reasons:

The Department has not identified any evidence to indicate such opportunities. However, the responses to the consultation will be monitored to inform the position.

Additional considerations

Multiple identity

Generally speaking, people can fall into more than one Section 75 category. Taking this into consideration, are there any potential impacts of the policy/decision on people with multiple identities? If so, please detail below.

(For example; disabled minority ethnic people; disabled women; young Protestant men; and young lesbians, gay and bisexual people).

Provide details of data on the impact of the policy on people with multiple identities. Specify relevant Section 75 categories concerned.

There is no available evidence to indicate potential impacts on people with multiple identities. However, the responses to the consultation will be evaluated and built into final policy/ guidance as necessary.

DAERA also has legislative obligations to meet under the **Disability Discrimination Order**. Questions 5 - 6 relate to these.

Consideration of Disability Duties

5. **Does this proposed policy or decision provide an opportunity for DAERA to better *promote positive attitudes* towards disabled people?**

The proposed policy would apply equally to all stakeholders. It is not anticipated that it will provide an opportunity to promote positive attitudes towards people with a disability. However, the responses to the consultation will be monitored to inform the position.

6. **Does this proposed policy or decision provide an opportunity to actively *increase the participation* by disabled people in public life?**

The proposed policy does not provide an opportunity to actively increase the participation by disabled people in public life. However, the responses to the consultation will be monitored to inform the position.

Part 3. Screening decision (Please delete as appropriate)

"Screened out" without mitigation or an alternative policy proposed to be adopted.

If the decision is *not to conduct an equality impact assessment*, please provide details of the reasons.

The policy applies uniformly to organisations operating within the rescue and rehoming sector and does not directly impact individuals or Section 75 groups.

In order to identify the likely impact of the proposals on groups of people within each of the Section 75 categories, the following publications were explored: the Northern Ireland Census 2021; the NI Live & Times survey 2024; the Dogs Trust's National Dog Survey 2025, and NI council dog statistics (published on the DAERA website). This Equality and Human Rights Screening Exercise assessed the evidence relating to s75 considerations, including equality of opportunity and good relations, and Disability Duties and Human Rights.
The exercise has concluded that the policy would apply equally to all stakeholders.

A public consultation will however invite comments on the proposals, and on this Equality and Human Rights Screening Exercise, and responses will be monitored to further inform the position.

If the decision is not to conduct an equality impact assessment the public authority should consider if the policy should *be mitigated or an alternative policy be introduced* - please provide details.

N/A. No mitigations or alternatives are needed. The policy will apply to rescue and rehoming organisations equally. A public consultation will however invite comments on the proposals, and on this Equality and Human Rights Screening Exercise, and responses will be monitored to further inform the position.

If the decision is to *subject the policy to an equality impact assessment*, please provide details of the reasons.

N/A

All public authorities' equality schemes must state the authority's arrangements for assessing and consulting on the likely impact of policies adopted or proposed to be adopted by the authority on the promotion of equality of opportunity. The Commission recommends screening and equality impact assessment as the tools to be utilised for such assessments. Further advice on equality impact assessment may be found in a separate Commission publication: A Practical Guide to Equality Impact Assessment

Mitigation

When the public authority concludes that the likely impact is 'minor' and an equality impact assessment is not to be conducted, the public authority may consider mitigation to lessen the severity of any equality impact, or the introduction of an alternative policy to better promote equality of opportunity or good relations.

Can the policy/decision be amended or changed or an alternative policy introduced to better promote equality of opportunity and/or good relations? ☐ **Yes** ☒ **No** (select as appropriate)

If so, *give the reasons* to support your decision, together with the proposed changes/amendments or alternative policy.

N/A

Timetabling and prioritising

Factors to be considered in timetabling and prioritising policies for equality impact assessment.

If the policy has been 'screened in' for equality impact assessment, then please answer the following questions to determine its priority for timetabling the equality impact assessment.

On a scale of 1-3, with 1 being the lowest priority and 3 being the highest, assess the policy in terms of its priority for equality impact assessment.

Priority criterion	Rating (1-3)
Effect on equality of opportunity and good relations	N/A
Social need	N/A
Effect on people's daily lives	N/A
Relevance to a public authority's functions	N/A

Priority criterion	Rating (1-3)
Total score	N/A

Note: The Total Rating Score should be used to prioritise the policy in rank order with other policies screened in for equality impact assessment. This list of priorities will assist the public authority in timetabling. Details of the Public Authority's Equality Impact Assessment Timetable should be included in the quarterly Screening Report.

Is the policy affected by timetables established by other relevant public authorities? ☐ Yes ☒ No (select as appropriate)

If yes, please provide details.

N/A

Part 4. Monitoring

Section 75 places a requirement on DAERA to have equality monitoring arrangements in place in order to assess the impact of policies and services etc; and to help identify barriers to fair participation and to better promote equality of opportunity. Please note the following excerpt from The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland in relation to monitoring:

A system must be established to monitor the impact of the policy in order to find out its effect on relevant groups. The results of ongoing monitoring must be reviewed on an annual basis. The public authority is required to publish the results of this monitoring. And they must be included in the public authorities´ annual review on progress to the Equality Commission. The Equality Scheme must specify how and where such monitoring information will be published. It is therefore essential that monitoring is carried out in a systematic manner and that the results are widely and openly published.

If the monitoring and analysis of results over a two year period show that the policy results in greater adverse impact than predicted, or if opportunities arise which would allow for greater equality of opportunity to be promoted, the public authority must ensure that the policy is revised to achieve better outcomes for the relevant equality groups.

Further advice on monitoring can be found at: ECNI Monitoring Guidance for Public Authorities

Outline what data you will collect in the future in order to monitor the impact of this policy or decision on equality, good relations and disability duties.

Equality:

The Department will monitor feedback received through the public consultation, including any evidence relating to equality impacts and will consider and evaluate prior to finalising the policy. If, or when, legislation is introduced, the Department will monitor impacts through engagement with councils during implementation.

Good Relations:

The Department will monitor feedback received through the public consultation, including any evidence relating to equality impacts. If, or when, legislation is introduced, the Department will monitor impacts through engagement with councils during implementation.

Disability Duties:

The Department will monitor feedback received through the public consultation, including any evidence relating to equality impacts. If, or when, legislation is introduced, the Department will monitor impacts through engagement with councils during implementation.

Part 5. Consideration of Human Rights

7. **The Human Rights Act (HRA) 1998 brings the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) into UK law and it applies in N Ireland. Indicate below by deleting Yes/No as appropriate, any potential *adverse impacts* that the policy or decision may have in relation to human rights issues.**

   See Annex A for brief synopsis on each of the Human Rights Articles & Protocols.

Right to Life	**Article 2**	~~Yes~~/No
Prohibition of torture, inhuman or degrading treatment	**Article 3**	~~Yes~~/No
Prohibition of slavery and forced labour	**Article 4**	~~Yes~~/No
Right to liberty and security	**Article 5**	~~Yes~~/No
Right to a fair and public trial	**Article 6**	~~Yes~~/No
Right to no punishment without law	**Article 7**	~~Yes~~/No
Right to respect for private and family life, home and correspondence	**Article 8**	~~Yes~~/No
Right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion	**Article 9**	~~Yes~~/No
Right to freedom of expression	**Article 10**	~~Yes~~/No

Right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association	**Article 11**	~~Yes~~/No
Right to marry and to found a family	**Article 12**	~~Yes~~/No
The prohibition of discrimination	**Article 14**	~~Yes~~/No
Protection of property and enjoyment of possessions	**Protocol 1 Article 1**	~~Yes~~/No
Right to education	**Protocol 1 Article 2**	~~Yes~~/No
Right to free and secret elections	**Protocol 1 Article 3**	~~Yes~~/No

8. **Please explain any adverse impacts on human rights that you have identified.**

No adverse impact on human rights has been identified.

9. **Please indicate any ways which you consider the policy positively promotes human rights.**

No ways to positively promote human rights have been identified.

Part 6 - Approval and authorisation

Before signing off this screening template please confirm that you have completed all the actions listed below.

I can confirm that all the actions listed below have been completed -

- I have explained any technical issues in plain English (easily understood by a 12 year old)
- I have used the most relevant, current & up to date data available
- I have added evidence and explained my assessments in full
- I have provided a brief note to justify my decision to 'Screen In' or 'Screen Out'
- A copy of this screening template and the final decision has been sent to the Equality Unit for their consideration before it has been forwarded for sign-off

Screening assessment completed by (Staff Officer level or above) -

Name: **Colin Stewart** **Grade: SO**

Branch: **Animal Welfare and Dog Control Policy Branch** **Date: 24 March 2026**

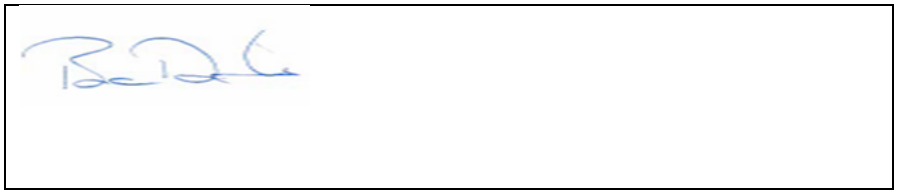
Signature: please insert a scanned image of your signature.

Screening decision approved by (must be Grade 3/Deputy Secretary or above) -

Name: **Brian Dooher** **Grade: 3**

Branch: **VSAHG** **Date: 16/4/26**

Signature: please insert a scanned image of your signature.



Note: A copy of the Screening Template, for each policy screened should be 'signed off' and approved by a senior manager responsible for the policy, made easily accessible on the public authority's website as soon as possible following completion and made available on request.

Please save the final signed version of the completed screening form in the CM container (AE2-19-11940) below as soon as possible after completion and forward the CM link to Equality Branch at equality@daera-ni.gov.uk. The screening template must be saved to the container in **HTML format** (not PDF) in order to comply with accessibility requirements. The screening form will be placed on the DAERA website and a link provided to the Department's Section 75 consultees.

Strategic
Management DAERA

For more information about equality screening, contact:

DAERA Equality Unit
Capacity, Capability, Equality & Diversity Branch
Jubilee House
111 Ballykelly Road
LIMAVADY
BT49 9HP

Email: equality@daera-ni.gov.uk
Tel: 028 7744 2027

Annex A

Synopsis of Human Rights Act Articles & Protocols

ARTICLE 2

Right to life

1. Everyone's right to life shall be protected by law. No one shall be deprived of his life intentionally save in the execution of a sentence of a court following his conviction of a crime for which this penalty is provided by law.
2. Deprivation of life shall not be regarded as inflicted in contravention of this Article when it results from the use of force which is no more than absolutely necessary:
    a. In defense of any person from unlawful violence;
    b. In order to effect a lawful arrest or to prevent the escape of a person lawfully detained;
    c. In action lawfully taken for the purpose of quelling a riot or insurrection.

ARTICLE 3

Prohibition of torture

No one shall be subjected to torture or to inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

ARTICLE 4

Prohibition of slavery and forced labour

1. No one shall be held in slavery or servitude.
2. No one shall be required to perform forced or compulsory labour.
3. For the purpose of this Article the term “forced or compulsory labour” shall not include:
    a. Any work required to be done in the ordinary course of detention imposed according to the provisions of Article 5 of this Convention or during conditional release from such detention;
    b. Any service of a military character or, in case of conscientious objectors in countries where they are recognised, service exacted instead of compulsory military service;
    c. Any service exacted in case of an emergency or calamity threatening the life or well-being of the community;
    d. Any work or service which forms part of normal civic obligations.

ARTICLE 5

Right to liberty and security

1. Everyone has the right to liberty and security of person. No one shall be deprived of his liberty save in the following cases and in accordance with a procedure prescribed by law:
    a. The lawful detention of a person after conviction by a competent court;
    b. The lawful arrest or detention of a person for non-compliance with the lawful order of a court or in order to secure the fulfilment of any obligation prescribed by law;
    c. the lawful arrest or detention of a person effected for the purpose of bringing him before the competent legal authority on reasonable

suspicion of having committed an offence or when it is reasonably considered necessary to prevent his committing an offence or fleeing after having done so;

d. the detention of a minor by lawful order for the purpose of educational supervision or his lawful detention for the purpose of bringing him before the competent legal authority;
e. The lawful detention of persons for the prevention of the spreading of infectious diseases, of persons of unsound mind, alcoholics or drug addicts or vagrants;
f. The lawful arrest or detention of a person to prevent his effecting an unauthorised entry into the country or of a person against whom action is being taken with a view to deportation or extradition.

2. Everyone who is arrested shall be informed promptly, in a language which he understands, of the reasons for his arrest and of any charge against him.
3. Everyone arrested or detained in accordance with the provisions of paragraph 1(c) of this Article shall be brought promptly before a judge or other officer authorised by law to exercise judicial power and shall be entitled to trial within a reasonable time or to release pending trial. Release may be conditioned by guarantees to appear for trial.
4. Everyone who is deprived of his liberty by arrest or detention shall be entitled to take proceedings by which the lawfulness of his detention shall be decided speedily by a court and his release ordered if the detention is not lawful.
5. Everyone who has been the victim of arrest or detention in contravention of the provisions of this Article shall have an enforceable right to compensation.

ARTICLE 6

Right to a fair trial

1. In the determination of his civil rights and obligations or of any criminal charge against him, everyone is entitled to a fair and public hearing within a reasonable time by an independent and impartial tribunal established by law. Judgment shall be pronounced publicly but the press and public may be excluded from all or part of the trial in the interest of morals, public order or national security in a democratic society, where the interests of juveniles or the protection of the private life of the parties so require, or to the extent strictly necessary in the opinion of the court in special circumstances where publicity would prejudice the interests of justice.
2. Everyone charged with a criminal offence shall be presumed innocent until proved guilty according to law.
3. Everyone charged with a criminal offence has the following minimum rights:
    a. To be informed promptly, in a language which he understands and in detail, of the nature and cause of the accusation against him;
    b. To have adequate time and facilities for the preparation of his defense;
    c. To defend himself in person or through legal assistance of his own choosing or, if he has not sufficient means to pay for legal assistance, to be given it free when the interests of justice so require;
    d. To examine or have examined witnesses against him and to obtain the attendance and examination of witnesses on his behalf under the same conditions as witnesses against him;
    e. To have the free assistance of an interpreter if he cannot understand or speak the language used in court.

ARTICLE 7

No punishment without law

1. No one shall be held guilty of any criminal offence on account of any act or omission which did not constitute a criminal offence under national or international law at the time when it was committed. Nor shall a heavier penalty be imposed than the one that was applicable at the time the criminal offence was committed.
2. This Article shall not prejudice the trial and punishment of any person for any act or omission which, at the time when it was committed, was criminal according to the general principles of law recognised by civilised nations.

ARTICLE 8

Right to respect for private and family life

1. Everyone has the right to respect for his private and family life, his home and his correspondence.
2. There shall be no interference by a public authority with the exercise of this right except such as is in accordance with the law and is necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security, public safety or the economic well-being of the country, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.

ARTICLE 9

Freedom of thought, conscience and religion

1. Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief, in worship, teaching, practice and observance.
2. Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs shall be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of public safety, for the protection of public order, health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.

ARTICLE 10

Freedom of expression

1. Everyone has the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers. This Article shall not prevent States from requiring the licensing of broadcasting, television or cinema enterprises.
2. The exercise of these freedoms, since it carries with it duties and responsibilities, may be subject to such formalities, conditions, restrictions or penalties as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society, in the interests of national security, territorial integrity or public safety, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals, for the protection of the reputation or rights of others, for preventing the disclosure of information received in confidence, or for maintaining the authority and impartiality of the judiciary.

ARTICLE 11

Freedom of assembly and association

1. Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and to freedom of association with others, including the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his interests.
2. No restrictions shall be placed on the exercise of these rights other than such as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security or public safety, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others. This Article shall not prevent the imposition of lawful restrictions on the exercise of these rights by members of the armed forces, of the police or of the administration of the State.

ARTICLE 12

Right to marry

Men and women of marriageable age have the right to marry and to found a family, according to the national laws governing the exercise of this right.

ARTICLE 14

Prohibition of discrimination

The enjoyment of the rights and freedoms set forth in this Convention shall be secured without discrimination on any ground such as sex, race, colour, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth or other status.

Protocol 1

ARTICLE 1

Protection of property

Every natural or legal person is entitled to the peaceful enjoyment of his possessions. No one shall be deprived of his possessions except in the public interest and subject to the conditions provided for by law and by the general principles of international law.

The preceding provisions shall not, however, in any way impair the right of a State to enforce such laws as it deems necessary to control the use of property in accordance with the general interest or to secure the payment of taxes or other contributions or penalties.

Protocol 1

ARTICLE 2

Right to education

No person shall be denied the right to education. In the exercise of any functions which it assumes in relation to education and to teaching, the State shall respect the right of parents to ensure such education and teaching in conformity with their own religious and philosophical convictions.

Protocol 1

ARTICLE 3

Right to free elections

The High Contracting Parties undertake to hold free elections at reasonable intervals by secret ballot, under conditions which will ensure the free expression of the opinion of the people in the choice of the legislature.

For further information:

Equality Unit,
Equality & Diversity Branch
Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA)
Jubilee House
111 Ballykelly Road
Ballykelly
Limavady
BT49 9HP

Tel: 028 7744 2027
Email: equality@daera-ni.gov.uk

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Title: Legislation to apply an inflationary increase to dog licence fees.	**Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA)**
	Date: March 2026
	Type of measure: Secondary Legislation
Lead department or agency: Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (the Department)	**Stage:**Initial
	Source of intervention: Domestic NI
Other departments or agencies: N/A	**Contact details:** Animal Welfare and Dog Control Policy Branch
	Animal Welfare and Dog Control Policy Branch DAERA Jubilee House 111 Ballykelly Road Limavady BT49 9HP
	animalwelfarepolicy@daera-ni.gov.uk

Summary Intervention and Options

What is the problem under consideration? Why is government intervention necessary? (7 lines maximum)
Under the Dogs (Northern Ireland) Order 1983, dog owners are required to hold a valid licence. The current standard licence fee has remained unchanged since 2011, despite rising costs associated with enforcement, additional challenges in relation to public safety and dangerous dogs, kennelling and administrative costs borne by local councils. The Department has been made aware that the cost to councils exceeds the income generated from dog licence fees. The Department is therefore considering an increase in the dog licence fee to ensure the scheme remains financially viable, promotes responsible ownership, and supports wider dog welfare and public safety objectives.

What are the policy objectives and the intended effects? (7 lines maximum)
The policy aims to ensure that the dog licensing system in Northern Ireland remains sustainable and capable of meeting statutory enforcement duties. The licence fee has remained unchanged since 2011, however costs to councils have increased and inflation has risen significantly during that period. It seeks to provide councils with additional resources to manage stray dogs, conduct investigations, and enforce dog control legislation. Increasing the fee will support wider public safety, reduce environmental nuisance, and improve dog welfare outcomes.

What policy options have been considered, including any alternatives to regulation? Please justify preferred option (further details in Evidence Base) (10 lines maximum)
Option 1: Do nothing – the licence fee would remain as it is, the resource implications for councils would continue to widen.
Option 2:*(the preferred option)* – The Department introduces new legislation to increase the licence fees in line with inflation. This option would provide councils with a more applicable level of resource to carry out their statutory dog control enforcement role.
Option 3: The Department introduces new legislation to increase the licence fees at full cost recovery to the councils.

Option 2 is the preferred option as it will increase income generated from licence fees to the councils by approximately 49% but allow licence fee to remain reasonable and proportionate.

Will the policy be reviewed? It will be reviewed	**If applicable, set review date:** 2036

Cost of Preferred (or more likely) Option		
Total outlay cost for business £m	**Total net cost to business per year** £m	**Annual cost for implementation by Regulator** £m
0	0	0

Does Implementation go beyond minimum EU requirements?			**YES** ☐	**NO** ☒
Is this measure likely to impact on trade and investment?			**YES** ☐	**NO** ☒
Are any of these organisations in scope?	**Micro** Yes ☐ No ☒	**Small** Yes ☐ No ☒	**Medium** Yes ☐ No ☒	**Large** Yes ☐ No ☒

The final RIA supporting legislation must be attached to the Explanatory Memorandum and published with it.
Approved by: Date:

Summary: Analysis and Evidence Policy Option 2

Description: Increase in Dog Licence Fees in line with inflation

ECONOMIC ASSESSMENT (Option 2)

Costs (£m)	Total Transitional (Policy) (constant price)	Years	Average Annual (recurring) (excl. transitional) (constant price)	Total Cost (Present Value)
Low	**0** Optional		**0**	**0** Optional
High	**0** Optional		**0**	**0** Optional
Best Estimate			**£396K**	**£3.96M**

Description and scale of key monetised costs by 'main affected groups' Maximum 5 lines

The primary monetised cost falls on individual dog owners, who will pay an increase in the annual dog licence fee (e.g., an increase of £6.00 from £12.50 to £18.50). Councils may incur small one-off communication and administrative update costs associated with publicising the new fee. Organisations operating boarding kennels or holding block licences will face minor increases. Overall, monetised costs are low and proportionate relative to the benefits of improved enforcement funding. There will be some resource implications for the Department to introduce new legislation.

Other key non-monetised costs by 'main affected groups' Maximum 5 lines

The Department does not hold information on costs to councils for the administrative costs of updating systems, forms etc to reflect updated licence fees; however, these will not be recurring costs as the fee will not be updated annually and councils will also benefit financially from the licence fee increase.

Benefits (£m)	Total Transitional (Policy) (constant price)	Years	Average Annual (recurring) (excl. transitional) (constant price)	Total Benefit (Present Value)
Low	**Optional**		**Optional**	**Optional**
High	**Optional**		**Optional**	**Optional**
Best Estimate				

Description and scale of key monetised benefits by 'main affected groups' Maximum 5 lines

Additional financial resource will support the delivery of the dog warden service by enabling councils to recover a larger portion of their costs. The service provided by dog wardens is not only provided for the benefit of dog owners, but to all citizens.

Other key non-monetised benefits by 'main affected groups' Maximum 5 lines

The policy will support improved dog control by providing more resource to council's dog warden service.

Key Assumptions, Sensitivities, Risks Maximum 5 lines

Key assumptions include stable licence uptake, steady dog population levels, and councils' capacity to implement the fee change without significant system alteration. Risks include a short-term decrease in compliance or public criticism, mitigated through communication and engagement. There is also a risk that enforcement costs continue to rise faster than revenue, but increasing the fee now helps address the current gap.

BUSINESS ASSESSMENT (Option 2)

Direct Impact on business (Equivalent Annual) £m				
Costs:0	**Benefits:0**	**Net:0**		

Cross Border Issues (Option 2)

How does this option compare to other UK regions and to other EU Member States (particularly Republic of Ireland) Maximum 3 lines

The other devolved administrations of the United Kingdom (England, Scotland and Wales) do not require owners to licence their dog. Dog owners in the Republic of Ireland (ROI) required to licence their dog; licences in ROI cost €20 for a yearly licence or €120 for a lifetime licence. This is equivalent to approximately £17.29 and £103.71 respectively.

Evidence Base

Problem under consideration

The current dog licence fee in Northern Ireland has remained unchanged since 2011 despite rising costs associated with enforcement, kennelling and administration. Councils report insufficient income to deliver dog warden services required by dog control legislation. Without intervention, enforcement capacity may decline, resulting in higher stray dog numbers and increased risks to public safety and animal welfare.

Rationale for intervention

Government intervention is required because dog licensing is a statutory regime under the Dogs (NI) Order 1983 and the licence fee is set in legislation. Fee levels cannot be adjusted without regulatory change. The market alone cannot deliver the public safety and welfare outcomes associated with dog control, as these rely on statutory enforcement and coordinated activity across councils. Updating the fee ensures the licensing regime can remain functional.

Policy objective

The policy aims to improve cost recovery for councils to maintain a dog licensing system and better resourced dog warden service.

Options

Option 1: Do nothing

The licence fees would remain at their current level. This would not address the concerns raised by councils around the costs of service delivery; the resource gap would continue to widen; and it would risk reduced enforcement activity. This option is not recommended.

Option 2: The Department increases the licence fees in line with inflation

This option increases the standard, concessionary and block dog licence fees to align with inflation rates. It reflects an increase of 48%, compared to the 150% increase in 2011. Therefore, it would meaningfully contribute to cost recovery while remaining affordable for the majority of dog owners. Additionally, it is administratively simple and aligns with existing systems.

This is the preferred option.

Option 3: The Department increases the licence fees at full cost recovery to councils

This option reflects the standard approach of achieving full cost recovery for fees according to Managing Public Money Northern Ireland (MPMNI) guidance. This would allow income raised through licence fees to cover all costs incurred in carrying out the regulatory functions, including the receipt and processing of applications, compliance monitoring, review and variation of licence conditions, and the issue of warning letters and notices.

Under MPMNI, the council's statutory responsibilities under the Dogs Order serves all members of the public, not just those who pay for dog licences. For instance, stray dogs are collected and impounded as a measure to safeguard the community from incidents such as attacks or sheep worrying. The service provided by dog wardens is not only provided for the benefit of dog owners, but to all citizens. As it is not only dog owners who benefit from the impounding of strays, but the public at large a mixture of user charging and ratepayer funding is deemed appropriate.

Councils have provided the Department information on the cost of enforcement and administration of the dog licence regime and have advised the total overall expenditure across the 11 council areas is approximately £5,457,004. To achieve full cost recovery, based on the 2024/2025 council statistics, the licence fee would need to increase to approximately £50; this is an average fee and does not take into account a concessionary fee or block licence fee.

This option was ruled out as it is a significant increase for dog owners and could impede the policy aims by discouraging owners from licensing animals, leading to increased non-compliance and thereby reducing the income to councils from the service. A licence fee set to achieve full cost recovery could meet intense political and stakeholder resistance on the basis it would penalise dog ownership, encourage licence evasion and the abandonment of dogs.

This option is not recommended.

Monetised Costs

Costs to Dog Owners

The Department is proposing an amendment to increase dog licence fees for single licences, block licences, and concessionary licences. The revised fee amounts will be established in legislation and adjusted according to the rate of inflation. To determine the updated rates, the Bank of England inflation calculator was used to convert the 2011 licence fees to projected costs effective September 2025.

According to the Bank of England inflation calculator, the adjusted figures are £18.59 for single licences, £47.59 for block licences, and £7.44 for concessionary licences.[1]

The Department proposes amending the Dogs Order to set the annual dog licence fees at £18.50 for single licences, £47.50 for block licences, and £7.50 for concessionary licences. The table below outlines both current licence fees and the proposed new rates.

Licence Type	Current licence fee	New proposed licence fee
Single	£12.50	£18.50
Block	£32.00	£47.50
Concessionary	£5.00	£7.50

Statistics collated from all eleven councils from April 2024 to March 2025 show income generated from licence fees was £806,950. Based on the number of licences issued between April 2024 to March 2025 it is estimated the income from new licence fees would be £1,203,042, generating an additional income of £396,092 per annum. The estimated additional income of £396k per annum amounts to £3.96 million across the ten-year period of this assessment.

The Department recognises that increasing dog licence fees will impose a modest additional cost on dog owners; however, the increase has been set at a level that is proportionate and not punitive. It is not expected to deter responsible ownership, encourage licence evasion, or contribute to the abandonment of dogs.

Council Costs

Statistics collated from all eleven councils from April 2024 to March 2025 [2]show 133,251 licences were issued for 138,083 dogs in Northern Ireland. Concessionary licence fees make up a majority

[1] Inflation calculator | Bank of England
[2] Council Dog Summary Statistics 2024/25 | Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

of this income (71%) with only 28% of dog owners in Northern Ireland paying the full licence cost of £12.50. Block licences are a small portion of this income (less than 1%).

The additional costs for an individual owner would be approximately £6.00 for a single licence, £15.50 for a block licence and £2.50 for the concessionary fee. The average lifespan of a dog is 10 to 13 years[3], therefore it is estimated the maximum additional cost to an individual owner is £78 for a single licence, £201.50 for a block licence and £32.50 for a concessionary licence over 13 years. Statistics collated from councils show that most dog licences issued in Northern Ireland are on a concessionary basis so the majority of dog owners will have an annual increase in their dog licence of £2.50.

Licence Type	Current cost to dog owner for average lifespan of a dog	New cost to dog owner for average lifespan of a dog
Single	£125 - £162.50	£185 - £240.50
Block	£320 - £416	£475 - £617.50
Concessionary	£50 - £65	£75 - £97.50

The Department does not hold information on costs to councils for the administrative costs of updating systems, and forms to reflect updated licence fees; however, these are expected to be minimal and will not be recurring costs. The fee increase will lead to minor administrative adjustments for councils and a short-term risk of reduced licence compliance as the new fee beds in.

Department Costs

The Department will incur minimal costs associated with the development and implementation of the policy. These include staff time to prepare the legislative amendment, carry out public consultation, analyse responses, and develop supporting guidance for councils. Additional costs may arise from communications activity to inform the public of the updated fee, although these are expected to be very small and absorbed within existing Departmental resources. No ongoing or significant operational costs are anticipated, as enforcement responsibilities remain with local councils under current arrangements.

Benefits

The new legislation will provide councils with additional financial resources to support delivery of dog warden services, helping to address rising costs since the fee was last updated in 2011. Increased revenue will ease funding pressures associated with administration, kennelling, and investigation of offences under the Dogs Order.

Therefore, the delivery of the dog licensing regime will be better supported by enabling more effective dog control through a better-resourced enforcement service. The increased fee represents a reasonable contribution from dog owners towards public dog control measures that benefit the wider community.

Overall Impact
Benefits>Costs

Current dog licence fees are nominal in relation to the overall cost of owning and caring for a dog, and they do not reflect the full costs incurred by councils in administering licences and delivering dog control services. Increasing the fee will help councils recover a greater share of these expenses and promote responsible dog ownership.

[3] How Long Do Dogs Live? | PetMD

The additional revenue is expected to support delivery of dog warden services, enabling improved dog control, more effective enforcement, and enhanced public safety. These benefits are anticipated to outweigh any potential short-term reduction in licence compliance as the new fee is introduced.

The Department recognises the challenging financial climate and the pressures faced by households. While the proposal introduces a small increase in annual costs for dog owners, the resulting improvements to enforcement capacity and community safety will provide wider benefits to the public.

Appendix 1 - Rural Needs Impact Assessment (RNIA) Template

SECTION 1 - Defining the activity subject to Section 1(1) of the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016

1A. Name of Public Authority.

Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA).

1B. Please provide a short title which describes the activity being undertaken by the Public Authority that is subject to Section 1(1) of the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016.

Regulation made under the Dogs Order (Northern Ireland) 1983, to increase dog licence fees in Northern Ireland.

1C. Please indicate which category the activity specified in Section 1B above relates to.

Developing a	Policy		Strategy		Plan	
Adopting a	Policy		Strategy		Plan	
Implementing a	Policy		Strategy		Plan	
Revising a	Policy	X	Strategy		Plan	
Designing a Public Service						
Delivering a Public Service						

1D. Please provide the official title (if any) of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service document or initiative relating to the category indicated in Section 1C above.

Proposal to increase dog licence fees in Northern Ireland in line with inflation.

1E. Please provide details of the aims and/or objectives of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service.

The aim of this policy is to increase the dog licence fees to help councils to cover more of the cost of dog control services in their council area and promote responsible dog ownership. Dog licence fees were introduced in Northern Ireland in 1983 at an annual rate of £5. This rate remained unchanged until 2011, when it was increased to £12.50.

1F. What definition of 'rural' is the Public Authority using in respect of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service?

Population Settlements of less than 5,000 (Default definition).	X
Other Definition (Provide details and the rationale below).	
A definition of 'rural' is not applicable.	

Details of alternative definition of 'rural' used.

N/A

Rationale for using alternative definition of 'rural'.

N/A

Reasons why a definition of 'rural' is not applicable.

N/A

SECTION 2 - Understanding the impact of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service

2A. Is the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service likely to impact on people in rural areas?

Yes [X] No [ ] If the response is **NO** GO TO Section **2E**.

2B. Please explain how the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is likely to impact on people in rural areas.

The aim of this policy is to increase the dog licence fees to help councils to cover more of the cost of dog control services in their council area and promote responsible dog ownership. Dog licence fees were introduced in Northern Ireland in 1983 at an annual rate of £5. This rate remained unchanged until 2011, when it was increased to £12.50.

The Department has been made aware the cost of various activities related to licensing and dog control such as administering licences and delivering dog control services via dog wardens exceeds the income generated from dog licence fees.

This policy will impact dog owners in both urban and rural settings equally.

The Department has carried out a Regulatory Impact Assessment which provides details on the costs/benefits analysis.

2C. If the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is likely to impact on people in rural areas *differently* from people in urban areas, please explain how it is likely to impact on people in rural areas differently.

This policy will apply equally across all dog owners and locations in Northern Ireland, regardless of whether they are based in rural areas or towns/ cities. People from rural areas would not be impacted differently to those who are based in urban areas.

2D. Please indicate which of the following rural policy areas the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is likely to primarily impact on.

Rural Businesses	
Rural Tourism	
Rural Housing	X
Jobs or Employment in Rural Areas	
Education or Training in Rural Areas	
Broadband or Mobile Communications in Rural Areas	
Transport Services or Infrastructure in Rural Areas	
Health or Social Care Services in Rural Areas	
Poverty in Rural Areas	
Deprivation in Rural Areas	
Rural Crime or Community Safety	
Rural Development	
Agri-Environment	
Other (Please state)	

If the response to Section 2A was YES GO TO Section 3A.

2E. Please explain why the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is NOT likely to impact on people in rural areas.

N/A

SECTION 3 - Identifying the Social and Economic Needs of Persons in Rural Areas

3A. Has the Public Authority taken steps to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas that are relevant to the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service?

Yes ☐ No ☒ If the response is **NO** GO TO Section **3E**.

3B. Please indicate which of the following methods or information sources were used by the Public Authority to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas.

Consultation with Rural Stakeholders	☐	Published Statistics	☐
Consultation with Other Organisations	☐	Research Papers	☐
Surveys or Questionnaires	☐	Other Publications	☐
Other Methods or Information Sources (include details in Question 3C below).			☐

3C. Please provide details of the methods and information sources used to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas including relevant dates, names of organisations, titles of publications, website references, details of surveys or consultations undertaken etc.

N/A

3D. Please provide details of the social and economic needs of people in rural areas which have been identified by the Public Authority?

N/A

If the response to Section 3A was YES GO TO Section 4A.

3E. Please explain why no steps were taken by the Public Authority to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas?

The social and economic needs of people in rural areas in relation to this policy, involving increasing dog licence fees, do not differ from the social and economic needs of the people from urban areas on this occasion.

SECTION 4 - Considering the Social and Economic Needs of Persons in Rural Areas

4A. Please provide details of the issues considered in relation to the social and economic needs of people in rural areas.

The social and economic needs of people in rural areas in relation to this policy, involving increasing dog licence fees, do not differ from the social and economic needs of people from urban areas in this occasion, so no consideration was given to social or economic needs as they are same across all areas.

SECTION 5 - Influencing the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service

5A. Has the development, adoption, implementation or revising of the Policy, Strategy or Plan, or the design or delivery of the Public Service, been influenced by the rural needs identified?

Yes ☐ **No** ☒ **If the response is NO GO TO Section 5C.**

5B. Please explain how the development, adoption, implementation or revising of the Policy, Strategy or Plan, or the design or delivery of the Public Service, has been influenced by the rural needs identified.

N/A

If the response to Section 5A was YES GO TO Section 6A.

5C. Please explain why the development, adoption, implementation or revising of the Policy, Strategy or Plan, or the design or the delivery of the Public Service, has NOT been influenced by the rural needs identified.

There have been no specific rural needs identified. The needs of all members of public and stakeholders have been considered, regardless of the location of dog owners and they are considered to be equal across rural and urban areas.

SECTION 6 - Documenting and Recording

6A. Please tick below to confirm that the RNIA Template will be retained by the Public Authority and relevant information on the Section 1 activity compiled in accordance with paragraph 6.7 of the guidance.

I confirm that the RNIA Template will be retained and relevant information compiled. X

Rural Needs Impact Assessment undertaken by:	Michelle Matthews
Position/Grade:	Deputy Principal
Division/Branch	Animal Health and Welfare Policy Division
Signature:	M. Matthews
Date:	23 March 2026
Rural Needs Impact Assessment approved by:	Christopher Andrews
Position/Grade:	G6
Division/Branch:	Animal Health and Welfare Policy Division
Signature:	C. Andrews
Date:	08 April 2026

Equality & Disability Duties Screening Template

December 2023 version

Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs
www.daera-ni.gov.uk

An Roinn Talmhaíochta, Comhshaoil agus Gnóthaí Tuaithe

Depairtment o' Fairmin, Environment an' Kintra Matthers

Screening flowchart and template (taken from Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 - A Guide for public authorities April 2010 (Appendix 1)).

Introduction

Part 1. Policy scoping – asks public authorities to provide details about the policy, procedure, practice and/or decision being screened and what available evidence you have gathered to help make an assessment of the likely impact on equality of opportunity and good relations.

Part 2. Screening questions – asks about the extent of the likely impact of the policy on groups of people within each of the Section 75 categories. Details of the groups consulted and the level of assessment of the likely impact. This includes consideration of multiple identity and good relations issues. This section also includes two questions related to the Disability Duties.

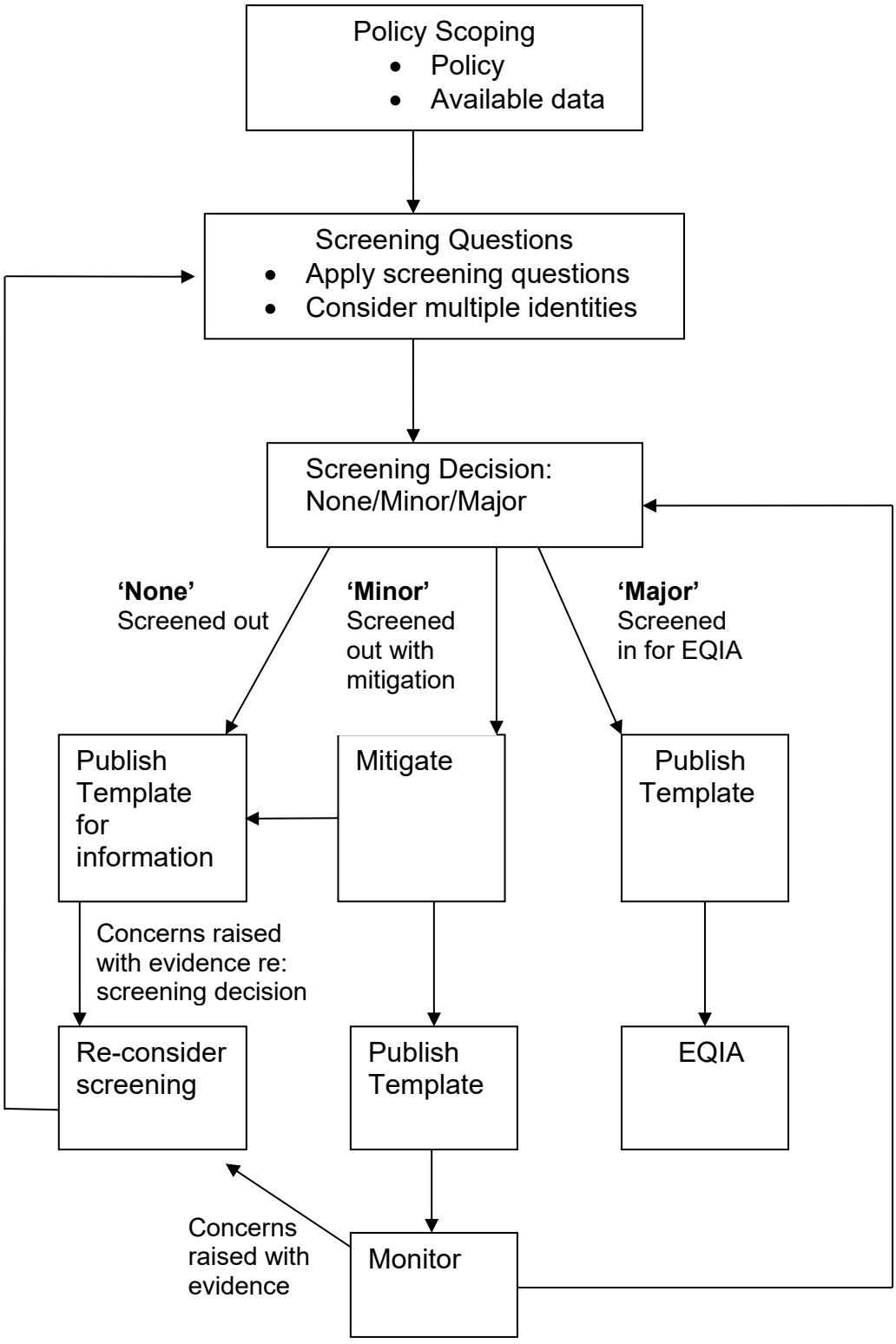
Part 3. Screening decision – guides the public authority to reach a screening decision as to whether or not there is a need to carry out an equality impact assessment (EQIA), or to introduce measures to mitigate the likely impact, or the introduction of an alternative policy to better promote equality of opportunity and/or good relations.

Part 4. Monitoring – provides guidance to public authorities on monitoring for adverse impact and broader monitoring.

Part 5. Consideration of Human Rights – please note this is not a Human Rights Screening form but rather a prompt that impacts on Human Rights should be considered.

Part 6. Approval and authorisation – verifies the public authority's approval of a screening decision by a senior manager responsible for the policy.

A screening flowchart is provided below.



Part 1. Policy scoping

The first stage of the screening process involves scoping the policy under consideration. The purpose of policy scoping is to help prepare the background and context and set out the aims and objectives for the policy, being screened. At this stage, scoping the policy will help identify potential constraints as well as opportunities and will help the policy maker work through the screening process on a step by step basis.

Public authorities should remember that the Section 75 statutory duties apply to internal policies (relating to people who work for the authority), as well as external policies (relating to those who are, or could be, served by the authority).

Information about the policy

Name of the policy

Inflationary increase to dog licensing fees in Northern Ireland.

Is this an existing, revised or new policy?

Revised policy. Dog licence fees were originally set in 1983 by the Dogs Order (Northern Ireland) 1983. Dog licence fees were amended in 2011 by the Dogs Amendment Act (Northern Ireland) 2011.

What is it trying to achieve? (intended aims/outcomes)

The policy would increase the dog licence fees for single licences, block licences and concessionary dog licences in Northern Ireland. The dog licence fee amounts would be specified in legislation and in line with the rate of inflation.

A block licence applies to a licence for three or more dogs kept by the dog owner at the same premises. A concessionary dog licence applies to dog owners on incomed related benefits or dog owners who have their dog neutered.
The policy aims to ensure that the dog licensing system in Northern Ireland remains sustainable and capable of meeting statutory enforcement duties. It seeks to provide councils with additional resources to manage stray dogs, conduct investigations, and enforce dog control legislation. Increasing the fee will support wider public safety, reduce environmental nuisance, and improve dog welfare outcomes.

Are there any Section 75 categories which might be expected to benefit from the intended policy? ☐ Yes ☒ No (select as appropriate)

If so, explain how.

No. Increasing dog licence fees would affect all dog owners in NI and there is no evidence to suggest that it would impact on any particular section 75 group within the community.
There will, however, be positive impacts to S75 groupings overall by enhancing public safety by implementing better controls over dog ownership and it may also help promote responsible dog ownership as more careful consideration may be given before purchasing a dog.

Who initiated or wrote the policy?

The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA)

Who owns and who implements the policy?

The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) is responsible for dog control policy and legislation.

Implementation factors

Are there any factors which could contribute to/detract from the intended aim/outcome of the policy/decision? ☒ Yes ☐ No (select as appropriate)

If yes, are they (please select as appropriate)

Financial ☐

Legislative ☒

other, please specify:

Main stakeholders affected

Who are the internal and external stakeholders (actual or potential) that the policy will impact upon? (please select as appropriate)

Staff ☒

Service users ☐

Other public sector organisations ☒

Voluntary/community/trade unions ☐

Other, please specify

District Councils - will be the main organisations affected by the policy, as they are responsible for enforcing the legislation, but they will also benefit from this policy as increasing the dog licence fees will help councils to cover the cost of dog control services in their council area.

Other policies with a bearing on this policy

What are they?

The Dogs (Northern Ireland) Order 1983

The Dogs (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 The Dogs (Licensing and Identification) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012

Who owns them?

DAERA

Available evidence

Evidence to help inform the screening process may take many forms. Public authorities should ensure that their screening decision is informed by relevant data. The Commission has produced this guide to signpost to S75 data.

What evidence/information (both qualitative and quantitative) have you gathered to inform this policy? Specify details for each of the Section 75 categories. *Please ensure all data used is the most current and up to date available. You should verify this by contacting the Departmental Statisticians.*

Religious belief evidence/information:

The proposed policy would affect all dog owners in Northern Ireland required to obtain a licence. Officials have researched this policy and considered how it could have an impact on different groups in Northern Ireland. There is no evidence available to suggest that increasing dog licensing fees will impact on stakeholders as the result of their religious beliefs. Data from the 2021 Census indicates that the main current religions in Northern Ireland were: 42.3% Catholic, 16.6% Presbyterian, 11.6% Church of Ireland, 2.4% Methodist, 6.9% Other Christian denominations and 1.3% 'Other' religions. In addition, 17.4% of the population had 'no religion'[1].

[1] census-2021-ms-b19.xlsx

Statistics provided by the UK Pet Food Association in 2024[2] indicates that there are 13.5 million dogs in the United Kingdom and that 36% of UK households own dogs. In addition, in 2024 it was estimated that 60% of households in the UK had a pet.

A survey from the Pet Food Manufacturers Association (PFMA) from 2022[3] indicated that in Northern Ireland had a higher percentage of homes with pet dogs (44%). Data from Pet Business World indicates that 55% of pet owners live in the city and about one-third are under the age of 40.

There is no evidence to suggest that pet ownership differs by religious belief or that religious belief will be impacted by this legislation.

Political Opinion evidence/information:

The proposed policy would affect all dog owners in Northern Ireland required to obtain a licence. Officials have researched this policy and considered how it could have an impact on different groups in Northern Ireland. There is no evidence available to suggest that increasing dog licensing fees will impact on stakeholders as the result of their political opinion.

However, results from the Northern Ireland Life and Times 2022[4] survey showed the following political opinions of those interviewed:

- Unionist – 31%
- Nationalist – 26%
- Neither – 38%
- Other – 1%
- Don't know – 4%

[2] UK Pet Food 2024 | Annual Report
[3] PFMA 2022 Annual Report | Pet Food Manufacturers Association
[4] Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey 2022: Online Questionnaire

There is no evidence to suggest that pet ownership figures stated above differ by political opinion, nor will political opinion be impacted as a result of the introduction of this legislation.

Racial Group evidence/information:

The proposed policy would affect all dog owners in Northern Ireland required to obtain a licence. Officials have researched this policy and considered how it could have an impact on different groups in Northern Ireland. There is no evidence available to suggest that increasing dog licensing fees will impact on stakeholders as the result of their racial background.

A paper on socio-demographics of pet ownership among adolescents in Great Britain, found ethnicity to be the single most important predictor of pet ownership, with white adolescents being more likely to own any type of pets than non-white adolescents.

Census 2021 figures show 96.6% of the NI population identify as White[5]. The new policy will impact all dog owners, and the general public, irrespective of racial group.

Age evidence/information:

The proposed policy would affect all dog owners in Northern Ireland required to obtain a licence. Officials have researched this policy and considered how it could have an impact on different groups in Northern Ireland. There is no evidence available to suggest that increasing dog licensing fees will impact on stakeholders disproportionately as the result of their age.

[5] census-2021-ms-b01.xlsx

Census 2021 figures show the following age breakdown for the NI population[6]:

- 0-14 – 19.2%
- 15-39 – 31.2%
- 40-64 – 32.4%
- 65 and over – 17.2%

A BMC veterinary Research paper on sociodemographic factors associated with pet ownership noted that pet ownership increased during childhood (up to age 10 years) and was expected to continue on this trajectory. However, it was found to peak, at age 11 for all pet types, then slightly decreased afterwards for all pet types except cats and dogs, which slightly increased.

A PDSA animal wellbeing report in 2022[7] indicated that dog owners are less likely to be in the age range 25-34 (14%) or 35-44 (14%) compared to cat (16% and 17% respectively), but more likely to be 55+ years (36%).

Marital Status evidence/information:

The proposed policy would affect all dog owners in Northern Ireland required to obtain a licence. Officials have researched this policy and considered how it could have an impact on different groups in Northern Ireland. There is no evidence available to suggest that increasing dog licensing fees will impact on stakeholders as the result of their marital status.

Data from the 2021 census showed that 45.6% of the population in NI[8] are married, 38.1% single, 6.0% divorced, 6.4% widowed and 3.8% separated. The policy will affect all dog owners equally, irrespective of marital status.

[6] census-2021-ms-a02.xlsx
[7] pdsa-paw-report-2022.pdf
[8] census-2021-ms-a30.xlsx

A PDSA animal wellbeing report in 2022[9] showed that dog owners are less likely to live in household of 1 person (12%) or 2 people (40%) but are more likely to be in 3-4 person households (38%) or 5+ people (8%).

Nevertheless, there is no evidence to suggest that marital status as a factor might be impacted by this legislation.

Sexual Orientation evidence/information:

The proposed policy would affect all dog owners in Northern Ireland required to obtain a licence. Officials have researched this policy and considered how it could have an impact on different groups in Northern Ireland. There is no evidence available to suggest that increasing dog licensing fees will impact on stakeholders as the result of their sexual orientation.

Data from the 2021 census showed that approximately 90% of the population are heterosexual, 2.1% gay, lesbian, bisexual or other sexual orientation, and 7.9% did not wish to state or left the question unanswered[10]. However, this policy will affect all dog owners in NI, irrespective of sexual orientation.

There is no evidence to suggest that pet ownership figures stated above differ by sexual orientation or that sexual orientation as a factor will be impacted by the introduction of this legislation.

Men & Women generally evidence/information:

The proposed policy would affect all dog owners in Northern Ireland required to obtain a licence. Officials have researched this policy and considered how it could have an impact on different groups in Northern Ireland. There is no

[9] pdsa-paw-report-2022.pdf
[10] census-2021-ms-c04.xlsx

evidence available to suggest that increasing dog licensing fees will impact on stakeholders disproportionately as a result of their gender.

Data from the 2021 census showed that 51% of the population are female and 49% male[11]. Data from a Pet Food Manufacturers Association (PFMA) survey from 2022[12] indicates that households who have a dog are 37% male and 32% female in the UK.

This policy will affect all dog owners in NI, irrespective of sex.
There is no evidence to suggest that gender as a factor will be impacted by the introduction of this legislation.

Disability evidence/information:

The proposed policy would affect all dog owners in Northern Ireland required to obtain a licence. Those who have a dog wholly or mainly for the purpose of assisting that person to carry out normal day-to-day activities relevant to their disability are not required to obtain a licence for that dog. Officials have researched this policy and considered how it could have an impact on different groups in Northern Ireland. There is no evidence available to suggest that increasing dog licensing fees will impact on stakeholders with disabilities, who are required to obtain a licence, disproportionately. Local councils collect data to dog licences in their area and the application form for a dog licence does not request details about disabilities.

Data from the 2021 census shows that 44.9% of the NI population are living with long term health problems or disabilities which impact their day-to-day activities a lot[13].

[11] census-2021-ms-a07.xlsx
[12] PFMA 2022 Annual Report | Pet Food Manufacturers Association
[13] census-2021-ms-d03.xlsx

Dependants evidence/information:

The proposed policy would affect all dog owners in Northern Ireland. Officials have researched this policy and considered how it could have an impact on different groups in Northern Ireland. There is no evidence available to suggest that increasing dog licensing fees will impact on stakeholders disproportionately due to having dependants. Local councils collect the data in relation to dog licences in their area and the application form does not request details about dependents.

Data from the 2021 census shows that 30.7% of households have one or more dependent child under the age of 18[14].

Data from a Pet Food Manufacturers Association (PFMA) survey from 2022[15] indicates 46% of households who have children also have a dog in the UK.

Needs, experiences and priorities

Taking into account the information referred to above, what are the different needs, experiences and priorities of each of the following categories, in relation to the particular policy/decision?

Specify details of the needs, experiences and priorities for each of the Section 75 categories below:

Religious belief

The legislation will increase dog licence fees for single, block and concessionary licences in Northern Ireland. This policy will be applied to all dog owners required to obtain a licence in Northern Ireland. People in this

[14] census-2021-ms-a24.xlsx
[15] PFMA 2022 Annual Report | Pet Food Manufacturers Association

equality category are not identified as having distinct needs, experiences or priorities.

Political Opinion

The legislation will increase dog licence fees for single, block and concessionary licences in Northern Ireland. This policy will be applied to all dog owners required to obtain a licence in Northern Ireland. People in this equality category are not identified as having distinct needs, experiences or priorities.

Racial Group

The legislation will increase dog licence fees for single, block and concessionary licences in Northern Ireland. This policy will be applied to all dog owners required to obtain a licence in Northern Ireland. People in this equality category are not identified as having distinct needs, experiences or priorities.

Age

The legislation will increase dog licence fees for single, block and concessionary licences in Northern Ireland. This policy will be applied to all dog owners required to obtain a licence in Northern Ireland. People in this equality category are not identified as having distinct needs, experiences or priorities.

Marital status

The legislation will increase dog licence fees for single, block and concessionary licences in Northern Ireland. This policy will be applied to all dog owners required to obtain a licence in Northern Ireland. People in this

equality category are not identified as having distinct needs, experiences or priorities.

Sexual orientation

The legislation will increase dog licence fees for single, block and concessionary licences in Northern Ireland. This policy will be applied to all dog owners required to obtain a licence in Northern Ireland. People in this equality category are not identified as having distinct needs, experiences or priorities.

Men and Women Generally

The legislation will increase dog licence fees for single, block and concessionary licences in Northern Ireland. This policy will be applied to all dog owners required to obtain a licence in Northern Ireland. People in this equality category are not identified as having distinct needs, experiences or priorities.

Disability

The legislation will increase dog licence fees for single, block and concessionary licences in Northern Ireland. This policy will be applied to all dog owners required to obtain a licence in Northern Ireland. It is understood that people who have a disability may require assistance dogs to aid them in carrying out day to day activities and so they are not required to obtain a dog licence in those circumstances. People in this equality category required to obtain a licence are not identified as having distinct needs, experiences or priorities.

Dependants

The legislation will increase dog licence fees for single, block and concessionary licences in Northern Ireland. This policy will be applied to all dog owners required to obtain a licence in Northern Ireland. People in this equality category are not identified as having distinct needs, experiences or priorities.

Introduction

In making a decision as to whether or not there is a need to carry out an equality impact assessment, the public authority should consider its answers to the questions 1-4.

If the public authority's conclusion is **none** in respect of all of the Section 75 equality of opportunity and/or good relations categories, then the public authority may decide to screen the policy out. If a policy is 'screened out' as having no relevance to equality of opportunity or good relations, a public authority should give details of the reasons for the decision taken.

If the public authority's conclusion is **major** in respect of one or more of the Section 75 equality of opportunity and/or good relations categories, then consideration should be given to subjecting the policy to the equality impact assessment procedure.

If the public authority's conclusion is **minor** in respect of one or more of the Section 75 equality categories and/or good relations categories, then consideration should still be given to proceeding with an equality impact assessment, or to:

- measures to mitigate the adverse impact; or

- the introduction of an alternative policy to better promote equality of opportunity and/or good relations.

In favour of a 'major' impact

a) The policy is significant in terms of its strategic importance;
b) Potential equality impacts are unknown, because, for example, there is insufficient data upon which to make an assessment or because they are complex, and it would be appropriate to conduct an equality impact assessment in order to better assess them;
c) Potential equality and/or good relations impacts are likely to be adverse or are likely to be experienced disproportionately by groups of people including those who are marginalised or disadvantaged;
d) Further assessment offers a valuable way to examine the evidence and develop recommendations in respect of a policy about which there are concerns amongst affected individuals and representative groups, for example in respect of multiple identities;
e) The policy is likely to be challenged by way of judicial review;
f) The policy is significant in terms of expenditure.

In favour of 'minor' impact

a) The policy is not unlawfully discriminatory and any residual potential impacts on people are judged to be negligible;
b) The policy, or certain proposals within it, are potentially unlawfully discriminatory, but this possibility can readily and easily be eliminated by making appropriate changes to the policy or by adopting appropriate mitigating measures;

c) Any asymmetrical equality impacts caused by the policy are intentional because they are specifically designed to promote equality of opportunity for particular groups of disadvantaged people;
d) By amending the policy there are better opportunities to better promote equality of opportunity and/or good relations.

In favour of none

1) The policy has no relevance to equality of opportunity or good relations.
2) The policy is purely technical in nature and will have no bearing in terms of its likely impact on equality of opportunity or good relations for people within the equality and good relations categories.

Taking into account the evidence presented above, consider and comment on the likely impact on equality of opportunity and good relations for those affected by this policy, in any way, for each of the equality and good relations categories, by applying the screening questions given overleaf and indicate the level of impact on the group i.e. minor, major or none.

Screening questions

1. **What is the likely impact on equality of opportunity for those affected by this policy, for each of the Section 75 equality categories?** Please provide details of the likely policy impacts and determine the level of impact for each S75 categories below i.e. either minor, major or none.

   Details of the likely policy impacts on *Religious belief*:

Based on the available evidence cited above, there is nothing to indicate that pet ownership varies by religious belief or that this legislation would

have any impact on individuals due to their religious belief. It is therefore the opinion of DAERA that the proposed increase in fees will have no adverse effect on equality of opportunity for this group as it applies equally to all dog owners regardless of Section 75 category.

What is the level of impact? Minor ☐ Major ☐ None ☒
(select as appropriate)

Details of the likely policy impacts on *Political Opinion:*

Based on the available evidence cited above, there is no evidence to suggest that political opinion has an impact on pet ownership, nor will political opinion be impacted as a result of the introduction of this legislation. It is therefore the opinion of DAERA that the proposed increase in fees will have no adverse effect on equality of opportunity for this group as it applies equally to all dog owners regardless of Section 75 category.

What is the level of impact? Minor ☐ Major ☐ None ☒
(select as appropriate)

Details of the likely policy impacts on *Racial Group*:

Based on the available evidence cited above, there is no evidence to suggest that racial group has an impact on pet ownership, nor will racial groups be impacted as a result of the introduction of this legislation. It is therefore the opinion of DAERA that the proposed increase in fees will have no adverse effect on equality of opportunity for this group as it applies equally to all dog owners regardless of Section 75 category.

What is the level of impact? Minor ☐ Major ☐ None ☒
(select as appropriate)

Details of the likely policy impacts on *Age*:

Based on the available evidence cited above, there is no evidence to suggest that age has an impact on pet ownership, nor will age be impacted as a result of the introduction of this legislation. It is therefore the opinion of DAERA that the proposed increase in fees will have no adverse effect on equality of opportunity for this group as it applies equally to all dog owners regardless of Section 75 category.

What is the level of impact? Minor ☐ Major ☐ None ☒
(select as appropriate)

Details of the likely policy impacts on *Marital Status*:

Based on the available evidence cited above, there is no evidence to suggest that marital status has an impact on pet ownership, nor will martial status be impacted as a result of the introduction of this legislation. It is therefore the opinion of DAERA that the proposed increase in fees will have no adverse effect on equality of opportunity for this group as it applies equally to all dog owners regardless of Section 75 category.

What is the level of impact? Minor ☐ Major ☐ None ☒
(select as appropriate)

Details of the likely policy impacts on *Sexual Orientation*:

Based on the available evidence cited above, there is no evidence to suggest that sexual orientation has an impact on pet ownership, nor will sexual orientation be impacted as a result of the introduction of this legislation. It is therefore the opinion of DAERA that the proposed increase in fees will have no adverse effect on equality of opportunity for this group as it applies equally to all dog owners regardless of Section 75 category.

What is the level of impact Minor ☐ Major ☐ None ☒
(select as appropriate)

Details of the likely policy impacts on *Men and Women*:

Based on the available evidence cited above, there is no evidence to suggest that gender has an impact on pet ownership, nor will gender be impacted as a result of the introduction of this legislation. It is therefore the opinion of DAERA that the proposed increase in fees will have no adverse effect on equality of opportunity for this group as it applies equally to all dog owners regardless of Section 75 category.

What is the level of impact? Minor ☐ Major ☐ None ☒
(select as appropriate)

Details of the likely policy impacts on *Disability*:

Based on the available evidence cited above, there is no evidence to suggest that disability has an impact on pet ownership, nor will disability be impacted as a result of the introduction of this legislation. It is

therefore the opinion of DAERA that the proposed increase in fees will have no adverse effect on equality of opportunity for this group as it applies equally to all dog owners regardless of Section 75 category.

What is the level of impact? Minor ☐ Major ☐ None ☒
(select as appropriate)

Details of the likely policy impacts on *Dependants*:

Based on the available evidence cited above, there is no evidence to suggest that dependents have an impact on pet ownership, nor will dependents be impacted as a result of the introduction of this legislation. It is therefore the opinion of DAERA that the proposed increase in fees will have no adverse effect on equality of opportunity for this group as it applies equally to all dog owners regardless of Section 75 category.

What is the level of impact? ☐ Major ☐ None ☒
(select as appropriate)

2. **Are there opportunities to better promote equality of opportunity for people within the Section 75 equalities categories?**

☐ Yes ☒ No (select as appropriate)

Detail opportunities of how this policy could promote equality of opportunity for people within each of the Section 75 Categories below:

Religious Belief **- If Yes, provide details:**

N/A

If No, provide reasons:

There is no impact envisaged on, or opportunity to promote equality of opportunity for people within this category. However, the proposed reforms will be subject to a public consultation, and the responses to the consultation will be monitored to inform the position.

Political Opinion **- If Yes, provide details:**

N/A

If No, provide reasons:

There is no impact envisaged on, or opportunity to promote equality of opportunity for people within this category. However, the proposed reforms will be subject to a public consultation, and the responses to the consultation will be monitored to inform the position.

Racial Group **- If Yes, provide details:**

N/A

If No, provide reasons:

There is no impact envisaged on, or opportunity to promote equality of opportunity for people within this category. However, the proposed reforms will be subject to a public consultation, and the responses to the consultation will be monitored to inform the position.

Age **- If Yes, provide details:**

N/A

If No, provide reasons:

There is no impact envisaged on, or opportunity to promote equality of opportunity for people within this category. However, the proposed reforms will be subject to a public consultation, and the responses to the consultation will be monitored to inform the position.

Marital Status **- If Yes, provide details:**

N/A

If No, provide reasons

There is no impact envisaged on, or opportunity to promote equality of opportunity for people within this category. However, the proposed reforms will be subject to a public consultation, and the responses to the consultation will be monitored to inform the position.

Sexual Orientation **- If Yes, provide details:**

N/A

If No, provide reasons:

There is no impact envisaged on, or opportunity to promote equality of opportunity for people within this category. However, the proposed reforms will be subject to a public consultation, and the responses to the consultation will be monitored to inform the position.

Men and Women generally **- If Yes, provide details:**

N/A

If No, provide reasons:

There is no impact envisaged on, or opportunity to promote equality of opportunity for people within this category. However, the proposed reforms will be subject to a public consultation, and the responses to the consultation will be monitored to inform the position.

Disability **- If Yes, provide details:**

N/A

If No, provide reasons:

There is no impact envisaged on, or opportunity to promote equality of opportunity for people within this category. However, the proposed reforms will be subject to a public consultation, and the responses to the consultation will be monitored to inform the position.

Dependants **- If Yes, provide details:**

N/A

If No, provide reasons:

There is no impact envisaged on, or opportunity to promote equality of opportunity for people within this category. However, the proposed reforms will be subject to a public consultation, and the responses to the consultation will be monitored to inform the position.

3. **To what extent is the policy likely to impact on good relations between people of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group?**

Please provide details of the likely policy impact and determine the level of impact for each of the categories below i.e. either minor, major or none.

Details of the likely policy impacts on *Religious belief*:

This policy is not expected to impact on good relations between people of different religious beliefs because it applies to all dog owners regardless of religious beliefs.

What is the level of impact? Minor ☐ Major ☐ None ☒
(select as appropriate)

Details of the likely policy impacts on *Political Opinion*:

This policy is not expected to impact on good relations between people of different political opinions because it applies to all dog owners regardless of political opinion.

What is the level of impact? Minor ☐ Major ☐ None ☒
(select as appropriate)

Details of the likely policy impacts on *Racial Group*:

This policy is not expected to impact on good relations between people of different racial groups because it applies to all dog owners regardless of racial group.

What is the level of impact? Minor ☐ Major ☐ None ☒
(select as appropriate)

4. Are there opportunities to better promote good relations between people of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group?

Detail opportunities of how this policy could better promote good relations for people within each of the Section 75 Categories below:

Religious Belief **- If Yes, provide details:**

N/A

If No, provide reasons:

No, the policy will apply equally to all stakeholders regardless of religious belief.

Political Opinion **- If Yes, provide details:**

N/A

If No, provide reasons:

No, the policy will apply equally to all stakeholders regardless of political opinion.

Racial Group **- If Yes, provide details:**

N/A

If No, provide reasons:

No, the policy will apply equally to all stakeholders regardless of racial group.

Additional considerations

Multiple identity

Generally speaking, people can fall into more than one Section 75 category. Taking this into consideration, are there any potential impacts of the policy/decision on people with multiple identities? If so, please detail below. *(For example; disabled minority ethnic people; disabled women; young Protestant men; and young lesbians, gay and bisexual people).*

Provide details of data on the impact of the policy on people with multiple identities. Specify relevant Section 75 categories concerned.

The policy will apply equally to all dog owners who require a licence so people with multiple identities will not be adversely affected.

DAERA also has legislative obligations to meet under the **Disability Discrimination Order**. Questions 5 - 6 relate to these.

Consideration of Disability Duties

5. **Does this proposed policy or decision provide an opportunity for DAERA to better *promote positive attitudes* towards disabled people?**

The proposed policy would apply equally to all stakeholders. It is not anticipated that it will provide an opportunity to promote positive attitudes towards people with a disability. However, the responses to the consultation will be monitored to inform the position.

6. **Does this proposed policy or decision provide an opportunity to actively *increase the participation* by disabled people in public life?**

It does not provide an obvious opportunity to increase the participation by disabled people in public life. This policy is in relation to increasing dog licence fees in Northern Ireland and will apply equally to all stakeholders. However, the responses to the consultation will be monitored to inform the position.

Part 3. Screening decision (Please delete as appropriate)

"Screened out" without mitigation or an alternative policy proposed to be adopted.

If the decision is *not to conduct an equality impact assessment*, please provide details of the reasons.

The policy proposes to increase the dog licence fees for single, block and concessionary dog licences in Northern Ireland to help cover the cost of dog control services, enhance public safety through improved dog control and promote responsible dog ownership. This Equality and Human Rights Screening Exercise which assessed evidence relating to S75 considerations, including equality of opportunity and good relations, Disability Duties and Human Rights has concluded that the policy would apply equally to all dog owners and no group will be disproportionately impacted. A public consultation will however invite comments on the proposals, and on this Equality and Human Rights Screening Exercise, and responses will be monitored to further inform the position.

If the decision is not to conduct an equality impact assessment the public authority should consider if the policy should *be mitigated or an alternative policy be introduced* - please provide details.

N/A. No mitigations or alternatives are needed. The policy will apply to dog owners equally. A public consultation will however invite comments on the proposals, and on this Equality and Human Rights Screening Exercise, and responses will be monitored to further inform the position.

If the decision is to *subject the policy to an equality impact assessment*, please provide details of the reasons.

N/A

All public authorities' equality schemes must state the authority's arrangements for assessing and consulting on the likely impact of policies adopted or proposed to be adopted by the authority on the promotion of equality of opportunity. The Commission recommends screening and equality impact assessment as the tools to be utilised for such assessments. Further advice on equality impact assessment may be found in a separate Commission publication: A Practical Guide to Equality Impact Assessment

Mitigation

When the public authority concludes that the likely impact is 'minor' and an equality impact assessment is not to be conducted, the public authority may consider mitigation to lessen the severity of any equality impact, or the introduction of an alternative policy to better promote equality of opportunity or good relations.

Can the policy/decision be amended or changed or an alternative policy introduced to better promote equality of opportunity and/or good relations? ☐ **Yes** ☒ **No** (select as appropriate)

If so, *give the reasons* to support your decision, together with the proposed changes/amendments or alternative policy.

N/A

Timetabling and prioritising

Factors to be considered in timetabling and prioritising policies for equality impact assessment.

If the policy has been 'screened in' for equality impact assessment, then please answer the following questions to determine its priority for timetabling the equality impact assessment.

On a scale of 1-3, with 1 being the lowest priority and 3 being the highest, assess the policy in terms of its priority for equality impact assessment.

Priority criterion	Rating (1-3)
Effect on equality of opportunity and good relations	N/A
Social need	N/A
Effect on people's daily lives	N/A
Relevance to a public authority's functions	N/A

Priority criterion	Rating (1-3)
Total score	N/A

Note: The Total Rating Score should be used to prioritise the policy in rank order with other policies screened in for equality impact assessment. This list of priorities will assist the public authority in timetabling. Details of the Public Authority's Equality Impact Assessment Timetable should be included in the quarterly Screening Report.

Is the policy affected by timetables established by other relevant public authorities? ☐ Yes ☒ No (select as appropriate)

If yes, please provide details.

N/A

Part 4. Monitoring

Section 75 places a requirement on DAERA to have equality monitoring arrangements in place in order to assess the impact of policies and services etc; and to help identify barriers to fair participation and to better promote equality of opportunity. Please note the following excerpt from The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland in relation to monitoring:

A system must be established to monitor the impact of the policy in order to find out its effect on relevant groups. The results of ongoing monitoring must be reviewed on an annual basis. The public authority is required to publish the results of this monitoring. And they must be included in the public authorities´ annual review on progress to the Equality Commission. The Equality Scheme

must specify how and where such monitoring information will be published. It is therefore essential that monitoring is carried out in a systematic manner and that the results are widely and openly published.

If the monitoring and analysis of results over a two year period show that the policy results in greater adverse impact than predicted, or if opportunities arise which would allow for greater equality of opportunity to be promoted, the public authority must ensure that the policy is revised to achieve better outcomes for the relevant equality groups.

Further advice on monitoring can be found at: ECNI Monitoring Guidance for Public Authorities

Outline what data you will collect in the future in order to monitor the impact of this policy or decision on equality, good relations and disability duties.

Equality:

DAERA will consider all comments generated from the relevant public consultation. Should there be a reduction in the number of dogs being licensed following an increase in fees over a certain period may indicate an adverse impact which would be investigated further.

Good Relations:

DAERA will consider all comments generated from the relevant public consultation. Should there be a reduction in the number of dogs being licensed following an increase in fees over a certain period may indicate an adverse impact which would be investigated further.

Disability Duties:

DAERA will consider all comments generated from the relevant public consultation. Should there be a reduction in the number of dogs being licensed following an increase in fees over a certain period may indicate an adverse impact which would be investigated further.

Part 5. Consideration of Human Rights

7. **The Human Rights Act (HRA) 1998 brings the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) into UK law and it applies in N Ireland. Indicate below by deleting Yes/No as appropriate, any potential *adverse impacts* that the policy or decision may have in relation to human rights issues.**

   See Annex A for brief synopsis on each of the Human Rights Articles & Protocols.

Right to Life	**Article 2**	No
Prohibition of torture, inhuman or degrading treatment	**Article 3**	No
Prohibition of slavery and forced labour	**Article 4**	No
Right to liberty and security	**Article 5**	No
Right to a fair and public trial	**Article 6**	No
Right to no punishment without law	**Article 7**	No
Right to respect for private and family life, home and correspondence	**Article 8**	No

Right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion	**Article 9**	No
Right to freedom of expression	**Article 10**	No
Right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association	**Article 11**	No
Right to marry and to found a family	**Article 12**	No
The prohibition of discrimination	**Article 14**	No
Protection of property and enjoyment of possessions	**Protocol 1 Article 1**	No
Right to education	**Protocol 1 Article 2**	No
Right to free and secret elections	**Protocol 1 Article 3**	No

8. **Please explain any adverse impacts on human rights that you have identified.**

No adverse impact on human rights have been identified.

9. **Please indicate any ways which you consider the policy positively promotes human rights.**

No ways to positively promote human rights have been identified.

Part 6 - Approval and authorisation

Before signing off this screening template please confirm that you have completed all the actions listed below.

I can confirm that all the actions listed below have been completed -

- I have explained any technical issues in plain English (easily understood by a 12 year old)
- I have used the most relevant, current & up to date data available
- I have added evidence and explained my assessments in full
- I have provided a brief note to justify my decision to 'Screen In' or 'Screen Out'
- A copy of this screening template and the final decision has been sent to the Equality Unit for their consideration before it has been forwarded for sign-off

Screening assessment completed by (Staff Officer level or above) -

Name: Michelle Matthews **Grade:** Deputy Principal

Branch: Animal Welfare & Dog Control Policy Branch **Date:** 24/03/2026

Signature: please insert a scanned image of your signature.

Screening decision approved by (must be Grade 3/Deputy Secretary or above) -

Name: Brian Dooher **Grade: 3**

Branch: VSAHG **Date: 16/4/26**

Signature: please insert a scanned image of your signature.

Note: A copy of the Screening Template, for each policy screened should be 'signed off' and approved by a senior manager responsible for the policy, made easily accessible on the public authority's website as soon as possible following completion and made available on request.

Please save the final signed version of the completed screening form in the CM container (AE2-19-11940) below as soon as possible after completion and forward the CM link to Equality Branch at equality@daera-ni.gov.uk. The screening form will be placed on the DAERA website and a link provided to the Department's Section 75 consultees.

For more information about equality screening, contact:

DAERA Equality Unit
Capacity, Capability, Equality & Diversity Branch
Jubilee House
111 Ballykelly Road
LIMAVADY
BT49 9HP

Email: equality@daera-ni.gov.uk
Tel: 028 7744 2027

Annex A

Synopsis of Human Rights Act Articles & Protocols

ARTICLE 2

Right to life

1. Everyone's right to life shall be protected by law. No one shall be deprived of his life intentionally save in the execution of a sentence of a court following his conviction of a crime for which this penalty is provided by law.
2. Deprivation of life shall not be regarded as inflicted in contravention of this Article when it results from the use of force which is no more than absolutely necessary:
    a. In defense of any person from unlawful violence;
    b. In order to effect a lawful arrest or to prevent the escape of a person lawfully detained;
    c. In action lawfully taken for the purpose of quelling a riot or insurrection.

ARTICLE 3

Prohibition of torture

No one shall be subjected to torture or to inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

ARTICLE 4

Prohibition of slavery and forced labour

1. No one shall be held in slavery or servitude.
2. No one shall be required to perform forced or compulsory labour.
3. For the purpose of this Article the term “forced or compulsory labour” shall not include:
    a. Any work required to be done in the ordinary course of detention imposed according to the provisions of Article 5 of this Convention or during conditional release from such detention;
    b. Any service of a military character or, in case of conscientious objectors in countries where they are recognised, service exacted instead of compulsory military service;
    c. Any service exacted in case of an emergency or calamity threatening the life or well-being of the community;
    d. Any work or service which forms part of normal civic obligations.

ARTICLE 5

Right to liberty and security

1. Everyone has the right to liberty and security of person. No one shall be deprived of his liberty save in the following cases and in accordance with a procedure prescribed by law:
    a. The lawful detention of a person after conviction by a competent court;
    b. The lawful arrest or detention of a person for non-compliance with the lawful order of a court or in order to secure the fulfilment of any obligation prescribed by law;
    c. the lawful arrest or detention of a person effected for the purpose of bringing him before the competent legal authority on reasonable

suspicion of having committed an offence or when it is reasonably considered necessary to prevent his committing an offence or fleeing after having done so;

d. the detention of a minor by lawful order for the purpose of educational supervision or his lawful detention for the purpose of bringing him before the competent legal authority;
e. The lawful detention of persons for the prevention of the spreading of infectious diseases, of persons of unsound mind, alcoholics or drug addicts or vagrants;
f. The lawful arrest or detention of a person to prevent his effecting an unauthorised entry into the country or of a person against whom action is being taken with a view to deportation or extradition.

2. Everyone who is arrested shall be informed promptly, in a language which he understands, of the reasons for his arrest and of any charge against him.
3. Everyone arrested or detained in accordance with the provisions of paragraph 1(c) of this Article shall be brought promptly before a judge or other officer authorised by law to exercise judicial power and shall be entitled to trial within a reasonable time or to release pending trial. Release may be conditioned by guarantees to appear for trial.
4. Everyone who is deprived of his liberty by arrest or detention shall be entitled to take proceedings by which the lawfulness of his detention shall be decided speedily by a court and his release ordered if the detention is not lawful.
5. Everyone who has been the victim of arrest or detention in contravention of the provisions of this Article shall have an enforceable right to compensation.

ARTICLE 6

Right to a fair trial

1. In the determination of his civil rights and obligations or of any criminal charge against him, everyone is entitled to a fair and public hearing within a reasonable time by an independent and impartial tribunal established by law. Judgment shall be pronounced publicly but the press and public may be excluded from all or part of the trial in the interest of morals, public order or national security in a democratic society, where the interests of juveniles or the protection of the private life of the parties so require, or to the extent strictly necessary in the opinion of the court in special circumstances where publicity would prejudice the interests of justice.
2. Everyone charged with a criminal offence shall be presumed innocent until proved guilty according to law.
3. Everyone charged with a criminal offence has the following minimum rights:
    a. To be informed promptly, in a language which he understands and in detail, of the nature and cause of the accusation against him;
    b. To have adequate time and facilities for the preparation of his defense;
    c. To defend himself in person or through legal assistance of his own choosing or, if he has not sufficient means to pay for legal assistance, to be given it free when the interests of justice so require;
    d. To examine or have examined witnesses against him and to obtain the attendance and examination of witnesses on his behalf under the same conditions as witnesses against him;
    e. To have the free assistance of an interpreter if he cannot understand or speak the language used in court.

ARTICLE 7

No punishment without law

1. No one shall be held guilty of any criminal offence on account of any act or omission which did not constitute a criminal offence under national or international law at the time when it was committed. Nor shall a heavier penalty be imposed than the one that was applicable at the time the criminal offence was committed.
2. This Article shall not prejudice the trial and punishment of any person for any act or omission which, at the time when it was committed, was criminal according to the general principles of law recognised by civilised nations.

ARTICLE 8

Right to respect for private and family life

1. Everyone has the right to respect for his private and family life, his home and his correspondence.
2. There shall be no interference by a public authority with the exercise of this right except such as is in accordance with the law and is necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security, public safety or the economic well-being of the country, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.

ARTICLE 9

Freedom of thought, conscience and religion

1. Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief, in worship, teaching, practice and observance.
2. Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs shall be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of public safety, for the protection of public order, health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.

ARTICLE 10

Freedom of expression

1. Everyone has the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers. This Article shall not prevent States from requiring the licensing of broadcasting, television or cinema enterprises.
2. The exercise of these freedoms, since it carries with it duties and responsibilities, may be subject to such formalities, conditions, restrictions or penalties as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society, in the interests of national security, territorial integrity or public safety, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals, for the protection of the reputation or rights of others, for preventing the disclosure of information received in confidence, or for maintaining the authority and impartiality of the judiciary.

ARTICLE 11

Freedom of assembly and association

1. Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and to freedom of association with others, including the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his interests.
2. No restrictions shall be placed on the exercise of these rights other than such as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security or public safety, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others. This Article shall not prevent the imposition of lawful restrictions on the exercise of these rights by members of the armed forces, of the police or of the administration of the State.

ARTICLE 12

Right to marry

Men and women of marriageable age have the right to marry and to found a family, according to the national laws governing the exercise of this right.

ARTICLE 14

Prohibition of discrimination

The enjoyment of the rights and freedoms set forth in this Convention shall be secured without discrimination on any ground such as sex, race, colour, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth or other status.

Protocol 1

ARTICLE 1

Protection of property

Every natural or legal person is entitled to the peaceful enjoyment of his possessions. No one shall be deprived of his possessions except in the public interest and subject to the conditions provided for by law and by the general principles of international law.

The preceding provisions shall not, however, in any way impair the right of a State to enforce such laws as it deems necessary to control the use of property in accordance with the general interest or to secure the payment of taxes or other contributions or penalties.

Protocol 1

ARTICLE 2

Right to education

No person shall be denied the right to education. In the exercise of any functions which it assumes in relation to education and to teaching, the State shall respect the right of parents to ensure such education and teaching in conformity with their own religious and philosophical convictions.

Protocol 1

ARTICLE 3

Right to free elections

The High Contracting Parties undertake to hold free elections at reasonable intervals by secret ballot, under conditions which will ensure the free expression of the opinion of the people in the choice of the legislature.

For further information:

Equality Unit,
Equality & Diversity Branch
Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA)
Jubilee House
111 Ballykelly Road
Ballykelly
Limavady
BT49 9HP

Tel: 028 7744 2027
Email: equality@daera-ni.gov.uk

Title: Proposal to ban specific aversive training devices for cats and dogs in Northern Ireland.	**Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA)**
	Date: April 2026
	Type of measure: Secondary Legislation
Lead department or agency: Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA/the Department)	**Stage:**Initial
	Source of intervention: Domestic NI
Other departments or agencies: N/A	**Contact details:** Animal Welfare and Dog Control Policy Branch
	Animal Welfare and Dog Control Policy Branch DAERA Jubilee House 111 Ballykelly Road Limavady BT49 9HP
	animalwelfarepolicy@daera-ni.gov.uk

Summary Intervention and Options

What is the problem under consideration? Why is government intervention necessary? (7 lines maximum)
Aversive training devices such as handheld electronic shock collars, choke collars and prong collars are currently lawful in Northern Ireland, however scientific evidence demonstrates that handheld electronic collars, choke collars and prong collars present significant risks to animal welfare without providing training benefits beyond those achieved through positive reinforcement methods. These devices pose the greatest risk of intentional misuse and direct harm to animal welfare. Section nine of the Welfare of Animals Act places responsibility on the responsible person to ensure the animals welfare. Allowing continued use of electric shock collars, prong collars and chock collars is inconsistent with this, given the scientific evidence. Government intervention therefore required to prevent unnecessary suffering and align Northern Ireland with emerging welfare standards adopted in other jurisdictions.

What are the policy objectives and the intended effects? (7 lines maximum)
The objective of the policy is to improve the welfare of cats and dogs by prohibiting the use of aversive training devices that present the highest risk of harm and misuse. The intended effect is to reduce pain, stress and behavioural harm, promote reward-based training methods and strengthen owner accountability.

What policy options have been considered, including any alternatives to regulation? Please justify preferred option (further details in Evidence Base) (10 lines maximum)

The following options were considered:
- **Option 1** – Do nothing and rely on existing animal welfare legislation
- **Option 2** – Issue guidance discouraging aversive devices
- **Option 3A** – Ban handheld e-collars and containment fence systems
- **Option 3B** – Ban handheld e-collars, choke collars and prong collars *(preferred option)*
- **Option 4** – Comprehensive ban on all aversive devices

Option 3B is the preferred option as it targets devices with the highest welfare risk, aligns with emerging EU standards and maintains proportionate flexibility for responsible pet ownership.

Will the policy be reviewed? It will be reviewed	**If applicable, set review date:** March 2031

Cost of Preferred (or more likely) Option

Total outlay cost for business £m	**Total net cost to business per year** £m	**Annual cost for implementation by Regulator** £m

Does Implementation go beyond minimum EU requirements?			**YES** ☒	**NO** ☐
Is this measure likely to impact on trade and investment?			**YES** ☐	**NO** ☒
Are any of these organisations in scope?	**Micro** Yes ☒ No ☐	**Small** Yes ☒ No ☐	**Medium** Yes ☒ No ☐	**Large** Yes ☒ No ☐

The final RIA supporting legislation must be attached to the Explanatory Memorandum and published with it.
Approved by: Date:

Summary: Analysis and Evidence — Policy Option 1

Description: Do nothing and rely on existing animal welfare legislation

ECONOMIC ASSESSMENT (Option 1 – Do nothing**)**

Costs (£m)	**Total Transitional (Policy)** (constant price)	Years	**Average Annual (recurring)** (excl. transitional) (constant price)	**Total Cost** (Present Value)
Low	**0**		**0**	**0**
High	**0**		**0**	**0**
Best Estimate	**0**		**0**	**0**

Description and scale of key monetised costs by 'main affected groups' Maximum 5 lines

This option would result in no additional monetised costs. There are no new administrative, regulatory, or enforcement expenditures for government, councils, owners, trainers, manufacturers, or retailers.

Other key non-monetised costs by 'main affected groups' Maximum 5 lines

- Continued welfare harm to animals due to the ongoing use and potential misuse of aversive training devices.
- Persistent misuse of devices where existing legislation does not sufficiently deter harmful practices.
- Reputational risk to the Department from perceived inaction, given stated policy intent and ongoing consultation activity in England, and announced regulatory proposals in the Republic of Ireland, following Wales's initial legislative change in 2010.
- Growing divergence from evolving European welfare standards, potentially undermining regional credibility and alignment with best practice.

Benefits (£m)	**Total Transitional (Policy)** (constant price)	Years	**Average Annual (recurring)** (excl. transitional) (constant price)	**Total Benefit** (Present Value)
Low	**0**		**0**	**0**
High	**0**		**0**	**0**
Best Estimate	**0**		**0**	**0**

Description and scale of key monetised benefits by 'main affected groups' Maximum 5 lines

No quantifiable benefits as no intervention occurs.

Other key non-monetised benefits by 'main affected groups' Maximum 5 lines

Doing nothing maintains the existing legal and operational status quo and does not address the welfare concerns.

Key Assumptions, Sensitivities, Risks Maximum 5 lines

This option assumes that existing legislation and guidance are sufficiently robust to manage welfare risks without further intervention. However, there is a high risk of increased public criticism, declining confidence in animal welfare protections and perception that the Department is failing to respond to emerging evidence of harm. The approach is highly sensitive to external scrutiny, welfare advocacy pressure, and international policy developments.

BUSINESS ASSESSMENT (Option)

Direct Impact on business (Equivalent Annual) £m		

Costs:	Benefits:	Net:		

Cross Border Issues (Option)

How does this option compare to other UK regions and to other EU Member States (particularly Republic of Ireland) Maximum 3 lines Other UK regions, Republic of Ireland and EU Member States are progressing towards bans or restrictions on aversive training devices. Maintaining the status quo would place Northern Ireland out of step with developing welfare standards. This option represents the least alignment with UK, ROI and EU policy

Summary: Analysis and Evidence Policy Option 2

Description: Issue guidance discouraging aversive devices

ECONOMIC ASSESSMENT (Option 2)

Costs (£m)	Total Transitional (Policy) (constant price)	Years	Average Annual (recurring) (excl. transitional) (constant price)	Total Cost (Present Value)
Low	**Optional**		**Optional**	**Optional**
High	**Optional**		**Optional**	**Optional**
Best Estimate				

Description and scale of key monetised costs by 'main affected groups' Maximum 5 lines

No cost monetised

Other key non-monetised costs by 'main affected groups' Maximum 5 lines

This option carries minimal costs, primarily low administrative expenditure required to update, publish and disseminate revised training guidance.

There may be non-monetised costs associated with the continued availability and use of aversive training devices, as guidance alone does not restrict their use. Animal welfare organisations and pet owners may experience ongoing negative welfare outcomes where harmful devices remain in use due to non-compliance with voluntary guidance.

Benefits (£m)	Total Transitional (Policy) (constant price)	Years	Average Annual (recurring) (excl. transitional) (constant price)	Total Benefit (Present Value)
Low	**0**		**0**	**0**
High	**0**		**0**	**0**
Best Estimate	**0**		**0**	**0**

Description and scale of key monetised benefits by 'main affected groups' Maximum 5 lines

N/A

Other key non-monetised benefits by 'main affected groups' Maximum 5 lines

• Increased awareness of welfare risks associated with aversive training devices.
• Promotion of best practice and humane, positive reinforcement training methods.
• Potential, though not guaranteed, behaviour change among some pet owners and trainers who choose to follow the guidance.

Key Assumptions, Sensitivities, Risks Maximum 5 lines

The option assumes that voluntary guidance will meaningfully influence behaviour. However, evidence from comparable policy areas suggests guidance without enforcement is often insufficient to change practices. The lack of enforcement powers means it may be ignored by key user groups, limiting the expected welfare impact. Overall, while low-cost, the option is unlikely to produce substantial or consistent improvements in animal welfare.

BUSINESS ASSESSMENT (Option)

Direct Impact on business (Equivalent Annual) £m				
Costs:	**Benefits:**	**Net:**		

Cross Border Issues (Option)

How does this option compare to other UK regions and to other EU Member States (particularly Republic of Ireland) Maximum 3 lines

Issuing updated guidance would broadly mirror Scotland's advisory approach but fall well below the statutory direction being taken in Wales, England and the Republic of Ireland (ROI). It would not reflect the stronger regulatory moves in ROI or the EU's forthcoming restrictions. Overall, NI would remain misaligned with emerging legislative norms.

Summary: Analysis and Evidence Policy Option 3a

Description: Ban handheld e-collars and containment fence systems

ECONOMIC ASSESSMENT (Option 3a)

Costs (£m)	**Total Transitional (Policy)** (constant price)	Years	**Average Annual (recurring)** (excl. transitional) (constant price)	**Total Cost** (Present Value)
Low	**Optional**		**Optional**	**Optional**
High	**Optional**		**Optional**	**Optional**
Best Estimate				

Description and scale of key monetised costs by 'main affected groups' Maximum 5 lines

No costs monetised

Other key non-monetised costs by 'main affected groups' Maximum 5 lines

Non-monetised costs would include:

- Reduced access to containment systems considered by many owners, especially in large rural properties, to be safe, practical, and humane where physical fencing is costly or impractical.
- Potential increased risk of dogs straying, livestock worrying, or traffic incidents where alternative containment solutions are less effective.
- Loss of a behavioural management tool for some owners and trainers, even when used responsibly.
- Manufacturers and retailers would experience loss of sales due to the removal of these products from the market.
- Pet owners, particularly those relying on electronic containment systems, may face transition costs, including purchasing alternative fencing or training solutions.
- Local councils and enforcement bodies would incur ongoing enforcement costs, including monitoring, responding to reports, and potential legal action where non-compliance occurs.

Benefits (£m)	**Total Transitional (Policy)** (constant price)	Years	**Average Annual (recurring)** (excl. transitional) (constant price)	**Total Benefit** (Present Value)
Low	**Optional**		**Optional**	**Optional**
High	**Optional**		**Optional**	**Optional**
Best Estimate				

Description and scale of key monetised benefits by 'main affected groups' Maximum 5 lines

N/A

Other key non-monetised benefits by 'main affected groups' Maximum 5 lines:

- Complete removal of devices associated with painful stimuli and misuse, thereby improving overall animal welfare.
- Clarity and simplicity in messaging, as the policy bans all electric stimulus devices rather than differentiating between types.
- Alignment with certain European jurisdictions, strengthening the UK's position on welfare standards.
- Reduction in potential misuse or inappropriate application of shock-based training tools.
- Encourages humane, positive reinforcement–based training, supporting better behavioural outcomes

Key Assumptions, Sensitivities, Risks Maximum 5 lines

The option assumes that handheld shock collars and containment systems pose comparable welfare risks, though evidence suggests misuse risk is significantly higher with handheld remote-controlled devices than with automated containment systems. There is a high risk of opposition from rural stakeholders, landowners, and farmers who rely on containment fencing to prevent straying and protect livestock. The proportionality of the ban is highly sensitive to the availability, practicality, and cost of alternative containment methods. This option is not recommended.

BUSINESS ASSESSMENT (Option)

Direct Impact on business (Equivalent Annual) £m				
Costs:	**Benefits:**	**Net:**		

Cross Border Issues (Option)

How does this option compare to other UK regions and to other EU Member States (particularly Republic of Ireland) Maximum 3 lines

This option aligns most closely with Wales, the only UK jurisdiction banning both handheld devices and containment systems. However, it would go further than England, Scotland and the Republic of Ireland (ROI), all of which permit containment fences. Northern Ireland would therefore match the strictest UK model but exceed ROI and EU regulatory expectations.

Summary: Analysis and Evidence Policy Option 3b

Description: Ban handheld e-collars, choke collars and prong collars (preferred option)

ECONOMIC ASSESSMENT (Option 3b)

Costs (£m)	**Total Transitional (Policy)** (constant price)	Years	**Average Annual (recurring)** (excl. transitional) (constant price)	**Total Cost** (Present Value)
Low	**Optional**		**Optional**	**Optional**
High	**Optional**		**Optional**	**Optional**
Best Estimate				

Description and scale of key monetised costs by 'main affected groups' Maximum 5 lines

No costs monetised

Other key non-monetised costs by 'main affected groups' Maximum 5 lines

- Some owners or trainers who currently rely on these devices may need to adapt their training approaches, which could involve time and effort rather than direct financial costs.
- Potential confusion may occur in distinguishing prohibited devices from visually similar but lawful alternatives, creating minor practical challenges for enforcement and compliance.
- Limited resistance may arise from specific user groups who believe these tools are necessary for certain behavioural issues. Owners and trainers may face adjustment costs as they transition to alternative training tools and methods.
- Manufacturers and retailers of the banned devices would experience reduced sales and potential loss of product lines.
- Local councils would incur enforcement-related operational costs, including investigation, monitoring, and responding to reports of non-compliance.

Benefits (£m)	**Total Transitional (Policy)** (constant price)	Years	**Average Annual (recurring)** (excl. transitional) (constant price)	**Total Benefit** (Present Value)
Low	**Optional**		**Optional**	**Optional**
High	**Optional**		**Optional**	**Optional**
Best Estimate				

Description and scale of key monetised benefits by 'main affected groups' Maximum 5 lines

N/A

Other key non-monetised benefits by 'main affected groups' Maximum 5 lines

- Significant improvements in animal welfare, as the devices banned have the strongest evidence base for pain, fear, misuse, and behavioural harm.
- Reduction in avoidable suffering, including pain, anxiety, and injury caused by aversive collar types.
- Encourages humane, positive reinforcement–based training, supporting better behavioural outcomes.
- Helps reinforce public trust in the robustness of animal welfare protections.

Key Assumptions, Sensitivities, Risks Maximum 5 lines

The option assumes a clear distinction can be made between banned collars and permitted alternatives, though visual similarity between devices may pose enforcement challenges. Some opposition is expected from certain stakeholder groups who favour these devices for specific behavioural situations. The effectiveness of the ban will depend on the ability of enforcement bodies to identify and respond to breaches promptly and consistently.

BUSINESS ASSESSMENT (Option)

Direct Impact on business (Equivalent Annual) £m				
Costs:	**Benefits:**	**Net:**		

Cross Border Issues (Option)

How does this option compare to other UK regions and to other EU Member States (particularly Republic of Ireland) Maximum 3 lines

This option closely aligns with the direction of travel in England and mirrors the Republic of Ireland's upcoming ban on remote-controlled shock collars while retaining containment fences. It also reflects the scope of the forthcoming EU-wide prohibition on shock, prong and choke collars. Overall, it provides the strongest policy alignment across neighbouring jurisdictions.

Summary: Analysis and Evidence Policy Option 4

Description: Comprehensive ban on all aversive devices

ECONOMIC ASSESSMENT (Option 4)

Costs (£m)	**Total Transitional (Policy)** (constant price)	Years	**Average Annual (recurring)** (excl. transitional) (constant price)	**Total Cost** (Present Value)
Low	**Optional**		**Optional**	**Optional**
High	**Optional**		**Optional**	**Optional**
Best Estimate				

Description and scale of key monetised costs by 'main affected groups' Maximum 5 lines

No costs monetised

Other key non-monetised costs by 'main affected groups' Maximum 5 lines

- Removal of all aversive devices, including those considered lower-risk (e.g. spray collars, containment fences), may disproportionately affect responsible owners who use such devices safely and effectively.
- Potential increases in dog straying, livestock worrying, or safety risks where containment fences are removed without viable alternatives.
- Manufacturers and retailers would face significant loss of sales across multiple product categories.
- Pet owners, particularly those relying on containment systems, would incur costs to replace widely used tools with physical fencing or other alternatives.

Benefits (£m)	**Total Transitional (Policy)** (constant price)	Years	**Average Annual (recurring)** (excl. transitional) (constant price)	**Total Benefit** (Present Value)
Low	**Optional**		**Optional**	**Optional**
High	**Optional**		**Optional**	**Optional**
Best Estimate				

Description and scale of key monetised benefits by 'main affected groups' Maximum 5 lines

N/A

Other key non-monetised benefits by 'main affected groups' Maximum 5 lines

- Provides maximum welfare protection, eliminating all devices that rely on discomfort, pain, or fear.
- Offers clear, simplified enforcement, as all aversive devices are treated consistently, reducing ambiguity for regulators and the public.
- May strengthen public perception of strong welfare standards and ethical training practices.

Key Assumptions, Sensitivities, Risks Maximum 5 lines

This option assumes that all aversive training devices carry equal risk to animal welfare, though evidence suggests that specific devices carry lower misuse risks and can deliver positive welfare outcomes when used responsibly. There is a high risk of strong stakeholder resistance, particularly from rural communities, trainers, and landowners who value containment systems. The policy is highly sensitive to perceptions of over-regulation and may face challenges in public acceptability and political deliverability.

BUSINESS ASSESSMENT (Option)

Direct Impact on business (Equivalent Annual) £m				
Costs:	**Benefits:**	**Net:**		

Cross Border Issues (Option)

How does this option compare to other UK regions and to other EU Member States (particularly Republic of Ireland) Maximum 3 lines

A full ban, including containment fences and spray collars, would exceed all UK, ROI and EU approaches. It would be stricter than Wales, which does not prohibit spray collars, and significantly stricter than ROI, which continues to allow containment systems. NI would therefore be the most restrictive of all jurisdictions.

Evidence Base

Problem under consideration

Aversive training devices are designed to stop or control unwanted behaviours in animals by applying unpleasant stimuli such as electric shock, physical pressure or sudden sensory triggers. Devices commonly used for this purpose include handheld remote-controlled electronic collars, choke collars and prong collars. The use of these devices is not currently prohibited in Northern Ireland, although animals remain protected by the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, which makes it an offence to cause unnecessary suffering. Scientific evidence indicates that such devices can cause pain, fear, stress and anxiety, and may damage the relationship between animals and their owners. There is also no substantial evidence that aversive training methods are more effective than positive, reward-based techniques. Government intervention is therefore necessary to address the welfare risks associated with these devices and to provide greater clarity on acceptable training practices.

Rationale for intervention

While the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 provides general protections against unnecessary suffering, it does not specifically regulate the use of devices designed to control behaviour through aversive stimuli. Scientific evidence indicates that specific devices, particularly handheld remote-controlled electronic collars, choke collars and prong collars, can cause pain, fear, stress and anxiety and may result in both physical and psychological harm. Risks associated with these devices include injury to the neck or trachea, increased aggression or anxiety and behavioural deterioration. These devices are also open to misuse or incorrect application, and enforcement of appropriate use can be difficult in practice. Veterinary and animal welfare organisations have called for stronger regulation. In addition, several jurisdictions are moving towards restricting or prohibiting such devices. Government intervention is therefore considered necessary to address the welfare risks associated with these devices and ensure clearer protections for companion animals.

The Department's Code of Practice for the Welfare of Dogs and its Cat version, already recommends positive reward-based training and discourages the use of painful or frightening methods, but this guidance is non-binding. Legislative intervention provides greater certainty for pet owners, trainers and enforcement authorities, while ensuring consistent welfare protections.

Policy objective

The primary objective is to improve the welfare of cats and dogs in Northern Ireland by addressing the risks associated with aversive training devices. This will be achieved by prohibiting the use of aversive training devices that present the highest risk of harm and misuse.

The policy seeks to:

- Reduce pain, fear, stress and injury associated with aversive devices
- Promote humane, evidence-based training methods
- Strengthen owner accountability
- Maintain a proportionate regulatory approach

Description of options considered

Option 1 – Do Nothing

This option would retain the current position, relying solely on the general protections under the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 and existing non-statutory guidance. This would avoid new legislative burdens but would allow continued use and misuse of aversive devices known to harm animal welfare. It would not address stakeholder concerns or align with emerging standards.

Option 2 – Guidance Only

This option would involve issuing updated guidance discouraging the use of aversive training devices and promoting positive reinforcement methods. While low cost and non-legislative, guidance would be non-binding

and could be ignored. It would not provide enforceable protections or sufficient deterrence against harmful practices.

Option 3A – Ban handheld electronic collars and electronic containment fence systems

This option would prohibit all devices delivering electric stimuli, including remote-controlled collars and perimeter fence systems. This would simplify messaging and align with some European approaches but would remove containment systems that many owners, particularly in rural areas, view as a practical and humane solution where physical fencing is not feasible. This option was assessed as likely to generate strong opposition and was assessed as disproportionate.

Option 3B – Ban handheld electronic collars, choke collars and prong collars (Preferred Option)

This option targets the devices with the strongest evidence of welfare harm and misuse while retaining containment fence systems and spray collars, which present lower risks.

This approach:
• Focuses on greatest welfare impact
• Maintains proportionate flexibility
• Balances welfare protection with practical considerations

Option 4 – Comprehensive ban on all aversive devices

This option would prohibit all devices relying on aversive stimuli, including spray collars and containment systems.
While maximising welfare protection, it would remove tools that some owners and trainers regard as low risk when used appropriately and was assessed as disproportionate at this stage.

Monetised and non-monetised costs and benefits

Option 1 – Do Nothing

This option carries no additional financial or administrative costs. However, it results in continued welfare harm to animals, does not address misuse of aversive devices and risks reputational damage to the department. It also leads to increasing divergence from emerging UK, Republic of Ireland and EU welfare standards.

Option 2 – Guidance only

The option would involve minimal administrative costs associated with updating and distributing guidance. While it may increase awareness and encourage some voluntary behaviour change, it does not provide enforceable protections and is unlikely to deliver consistent or meaningful welfare improvements. Welfare issues would therefore be likely to persist.

Option 3A - Ban handheld e-collars and containment fence systems

This option would deliver significant welfare benefits through the removal of all electric stimulus devices. However, it introduces notable non-monetised costs, particularly for rural stakeholders who rely on containment systems as a practical alternative to physical fencing. There is a risk of unintended consequences, including increased dog straying and livestock worrying. This option is considered disproportionate given the lower misuse risk associated with containment systems.

Option 3B – Ban handheld e-collars, choke collars and prong collars

This option would deliver significant welfare benefits by targeting devices with the strongest evidence of harm and misuse. Non-monetised costs are expected to be limited and primarily relate to behavioural adjustments by owners and trainers, potential impacts on retailers and some enforcement activity. The option maintains flexibility by allowing lower-risk devices such as containment systems to remain in use, therefor reducing impacts on rural stakeholders.

Option 4 – Comprehensive ban on all aversive devices

This option provides the highest level of welfare protection. However, it introduces significant non-monetised costs, including impacts on responsible owners using lower-risk devices, increased costs for alternative containment measures and likely strong stakeholder opposition. It is considered overly restrictive and disproportionate at this stage.

Preferred Option - 3B

Based on the comparative assessment of costs and benefits set out above, Option 3B is identified as the preferred option.
This option provides the most proportionate balance between improving animal welfare and minimising adverse impacts on owners, businesses and rural stakeholders. It targets the devices with the strongest evidence of harm and misuse, while avoiding the unintended consequences associated with banning lower-risk devices such as containment systems.

Option 3B also aligns closely with the direction of travel in other UK jurisdictions and the Republic of Ireland, supporting policy coherence while maintaining flexibility for responsible pet ownership. Overall, this option is considered to provide the best balance improving animal welfare and being practical to implement.

Proportionality and level of analysis

Given the limited availability of quantitative cost data and the policy's primary focus on welfare outcomes, a qualitative proportionality approach has been adopted for this stage. Public consultation will seek further evidence on costs, benefits and practical impacts to inform any future full regulatory impact assessment.

Risks and assumptions

Key risks include:

• Resistance from some rural stakeholders, trainers and manufacturers
• Enforcement challenges where devices appear similar
• User non-compliance during transition

Key assumptions include:

• Legislative clarity will improve compliance
• Most owners will transition to humane training methods
• Welfare benefits will outweigh implementation costs

Direct costs and benefits to business

Businesses involved in the manufacture, sale and use of prohibited devices may experience reduced sales or service demand. Likewise, Dog Trainers who use currently use these devices during their training may also experience loss of business. Conversely, positive training providers may experience increased demand. Further evidence will be sought through consultation.

Wider impacts

The policy is expected to:
• Strengthen Northern Ireland's animal welfare framework
• Support long-term improvements in responsible pet ownership
• Enhance public trust in welfare standards

Overall impact

The proposed policy is expected to deliver a positive overall impact by improving the welfare of cats and dogs through the prohibition of the aversive training devices most strongly associated with pain, stress and misuse. While there will be some transition costs for owners, trainers and businesses that currently rely on these devices, these impacts are expected to be limited and proportionate, with opportunities for growth in

positive-reinforcement training services. Enforcement costs are anticipated to be modest and largely integrated within existing animal welfare frameworks. The approach strengthens clarity for owners and enforcement bodies and supports responsible pet ownership. Overall, the welfare gains and improved public confidence are expected to outweigh the associated costs.

Appendix 1 - Rural Needs Impact Assessment (RNIA) Template

SECTION 1 - Defining the activity subject to Section 1(1) of the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016

1A. Name of Public Authority.

Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (The Department)

1B. Please provide a short title which describes the activity being undertaken by the Public Authority that is subject to Section 1(1) of the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016.

Developing regulations under the Welfare of Animals Act (NI) 2011 to introduce a ban on specific aversive training devices for companion animals in Northern Ireland.

1C. Please indicate which category the activity specified in Section 1B above relates to.

Developing a	Policy	X	Strategy		Plan	
Adopting a	Policy		Strategy		Plan	
Implementing a	Policy		Strategy		Plan	
Revising a	Policy		Strategy		Plan	
Designing a Public Service						
Delivering a Public Service						

1D. Please provide the official title (if any) of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service document or initiative relating to the category indicated in Section 1C above.

Development of regulations to prohibit the use of specific aversive training devices for companion animals in Northern Ireland.

1E. Please provide details of the aims and/or objectives of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service.

The aim of this policy is to introduce a ban on the use of specific aversive training devices, namely handheld e-collars, choke chains and prong collars in Northern Ireland. This policy will help improve animal welfare in Northern Ireland.

1F. What definition of 'rural' is the Public Authority using in respect of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service?

Population Settlements of less than 5,000 (Default definition).	X
Other Definition (Provide details and the rationale below).	
A definition of 'rural' is not applicable.	

Details of alternative definition of 'rural' used.

N/A

Rationale for using alternative definition of 'rural'.

N/A

Reasons why a definition of 'rural' is not applicable.

N/A

SECTION 2 - Understanding the impact of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service

2A. Is the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service likely to impact on people in rural areas?

Yes [X] No [ ] If the response is **NO** GO TO Section **2E**.

2B. Please explain how the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is likely to impact on people in rural areas.

The proposed policy is to prohibit the use of specific aversive dog training devices, specifically remote-controlled e-collars, choke collars, and prong collars, is expected to have a range of implications for individuals residing in rural areas.

Training practices – Rural dog owners, particularly those managing working breeds for herding, or pest control, may currently rely on aversive devices for behavioural control. The policy will require a shift toward positive reinforcement-based training methods.

2C. If the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is likely to impact on people in rural areas *differently* from people in urban areas, please explain how it is likely to impact on people in rural areas differently.

This policy will promote animal welfare across all Northern Ireland, both in urban and rural areas. However, the proposed ban may affect rural communities slightly differently from urban populations due to the distinct roles dogs play and the environments in which they are kept and trained.

In rural areas, dogs can be used for working purposes, such as herding livestock, whereas in urban settings, dogs are primarily kept as companion animals. As a result, it is possible that dog owners may have relied more heavily on aversive training tools to manage working behaviours in demanding environments.

2D. Please indicate which of the following rural policy areas the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is likely to primarily impact on.

Rural Businesses	X
Rural Tourism	
Rural Housing	
Jobs or Employment in Rural Areas	X
Education or Training in Rural Areas	X
Broadband or Mobile Communications in Rural Areas	
Transport Services or Infrastructure in Rural Areas	
Health or Social Care Services in Rural Areas	
Poverty in Rural Areas	
Deprivation in Rural Areas	
Rural Crime or Community Safety	
Rural Development	
Agri-Environment	
Other (Please state)	

If the response to Section 2A was YES GO TO Section 3A.

2E. Please explain why the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is NOT likely to impact on people in rural areas.

N/A

SECTION 3 - Identifying the Social and Economic Needs of Persons in Rural Areas

3A. Has the Public Authority taken steps to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas that are relevant to the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service?

Yes [X] No [ ] If the response is **NO** GO TO Section **3E**.

3B. Please indicate which of the following methods or information sources were used by the Public Authority to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas.

Consultation with Rural Stakeholders	[ ]	Published Statistics	[ ]
Consultation with Other Organisations	[ ]	Research Papers	[X]
Surveys or Questionnaires	[ ]	Other Publications	[X]
Other Methods or Information Sources (include details in Question 3C below).			[ ]

3C. Please provide details of the methods and information sources used to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas including relevant dates, names of organisations, titles of publications, website references, details of surveys or consultations undertaken etc.

DAERA Officials have engaged with the Kennel Club to discuss the pros and cons of a potential ban, taking the needs of people in rural areas into consideration.

Development of this policy required significant desk research including research papers and analysis of policy and guidance in other jurisdictions:

- The use of shock collars and their impact on the welfare of dogs: A review of the current literature - *Emily Blackwell and Rachel Casey Department of Clinical Veterinary Science University of Bristol,* 2006
- Report on the use of handheld remote-controlled training devices (e-collars) in dog training - *Scottish Animal Welfare Commission,* April 2023
- BVA and BSAVA policy position on the use of aversive training devices in dogs and cats
- Proposal on the welfare of dogs and cats and their traceability – *EU Parliament*
- Welfare of dogs and cats and their traceability – *Legislative Observatory, EU Parliament*
- A review of recent evidence in relation to the welfare implications for cats and dogs arising from the use of electronic collars – *Author: Ruth Lysons, Reviewed by: Nick Coulson*, 2015

3D. Please provide details of the social and economic needs of people in rural areas which have been identified by the Public Authority?

This policy will promote animal welfare across all Northern Ireland, both in urban and rural areas.

However, rural dog owners may have less access to resources and support, such as training facilities, qualified trainers and educational materials, than people in Urban populations. Rural communities may require additional support, training resources, and engagement to ensure a smooth and effective transition that maintains both welfare standards and working dog functionality.

The Department will seek further evidence on these needs through a public consultation, which is expected to take place in summer 2026.

If the response to Section 3A was YES GO TO Section 4A.

3E. Please explain why no steps were taken by the Public Authority to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas?

N/A

SECTION 4 - Considering the Social and Economic Needs of Persons in Rural Areas

4A. Please provide details of the issues considered in relation to the social and economic needs of people in rural areas.

This policy will promote animal welfare across all Northern Ireland, both in urban and rural areas.

However, rural dog owners may have less access to resources and support, such as training facilities, qualified trainers and educational materials, than people in Urban populations. Rural communities may require additional support, training resources, and engagement to ensure a smooth and effective transition that maintains both welfare standards and working dog functionality.

A communication approach will be developed alongside the policy to ensure that information on the proposed changes, including guidance on alternative training methods, is accessible to both rural and urban dog owners. This will include stakeholder engagement and the use of online and offline channels where appropriate.

The forthcoming public consultation will also provide an opportunity to gather views from rural stakeholders and ensure that their specific needs and circumstances are fully considered in the final policy design.

SECTION 5 - Influencing the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service

5A. Has the development, adoption, implementation or revising of the Policy, Strategy or Plan, or the design or delivery of the Public Service, been influenced by the rural needs identified?

Yes [X] **No** [ ] **If the response is NO GO TO Section 5C.**

5B. Please explain how the development, adoption, implementation or revising of the Policy, Strategy or Plan, or the design or delivery of the Public Service, has been influenced by the rural needs identified.

The development of this policy has taken account of the needs of people in rural areas, particularly in relation to the use of working dogs and access to training support.

In order to mitigate potential impacts, the policy has been designed to take a proportionate approach by targeting only those devices with the strongest evidence of welfare harm, while not extending to other devices which may be considered more practical in certain rural contexts, such as containment fences.

The Department also recognises the need to support all dog owners, including those in rural areas, in transitioning of alternative training methods. This will be supported through the provision of clear guidance and stakeholder engagement.

The public consultation will actively seek views from the rural stakeholders to identify any further mitigation measures that may be required.

If the response to Section 5A was YES GO TO Section 6A.

5C. Please explain why the development, adoption, implementation or revising of the Policy, Strategy or Plan, or the design or the delivery of the Public Service, has NOT been influenced by the rural needs identified.

No rural needs have been identified. The Department will take account of any needs that might be identified during public consultation.

SECTION 6 – Documenting and Recording

6A. Please tick below to confirm that the RNIA Template will be retained by the Public Authority and relevant information on the Section 1 activity compiled in accordance with paragraph 6.7 of the guidance.

I confirm that the RNIA Template will be retained and relevant information compiled. X

Rural Needs Impact Assessment undertaken by:	Colin Stewart
Position/Grade:	Staff Officer
Division/Branch	Animal Identification & Welfare Branch
Signature:	Colin Stewart
Date:	13/03/26
Rural Needs Impact Assessment approved by:	Catherine Goligher
Position/Grade:	Grade 7
Division/Branch:	Animal Welfare and Dog Control Policy Branch
Signature:	Catherine Goligher
Date:	14 April 2026

Equality & Disability Duties Screening Template

December 2023 version

Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs
www.daera-ni.gov.uk

An Roinn Talmhaíochta, Comhshaoil agus Gnóthaí Tuaithe

Depairtment o' Fairmin, Environment an' Kintra Matthers

Screening flowchart and template (taken from Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 - A Guide for public authorities April 2010 (Appendix 1)).

Introduction

Part 1. Policy scoping – asks public authorities to provide details about the policy, procedure, practice and/or decision being screened and what available evidence you have gathered to help make an assessment of the likely impact on equality of opportunity and good relations.

Part 2. Screening questions – asks about the extent of the likely impact of the policy on groups of people within each of the Section 75 categories. Details of the groups consulted and the level of assessment of the likely impact. This includes consideration of multiple identity and good relations issues. This section also includes two questions related to the Disability Duties.

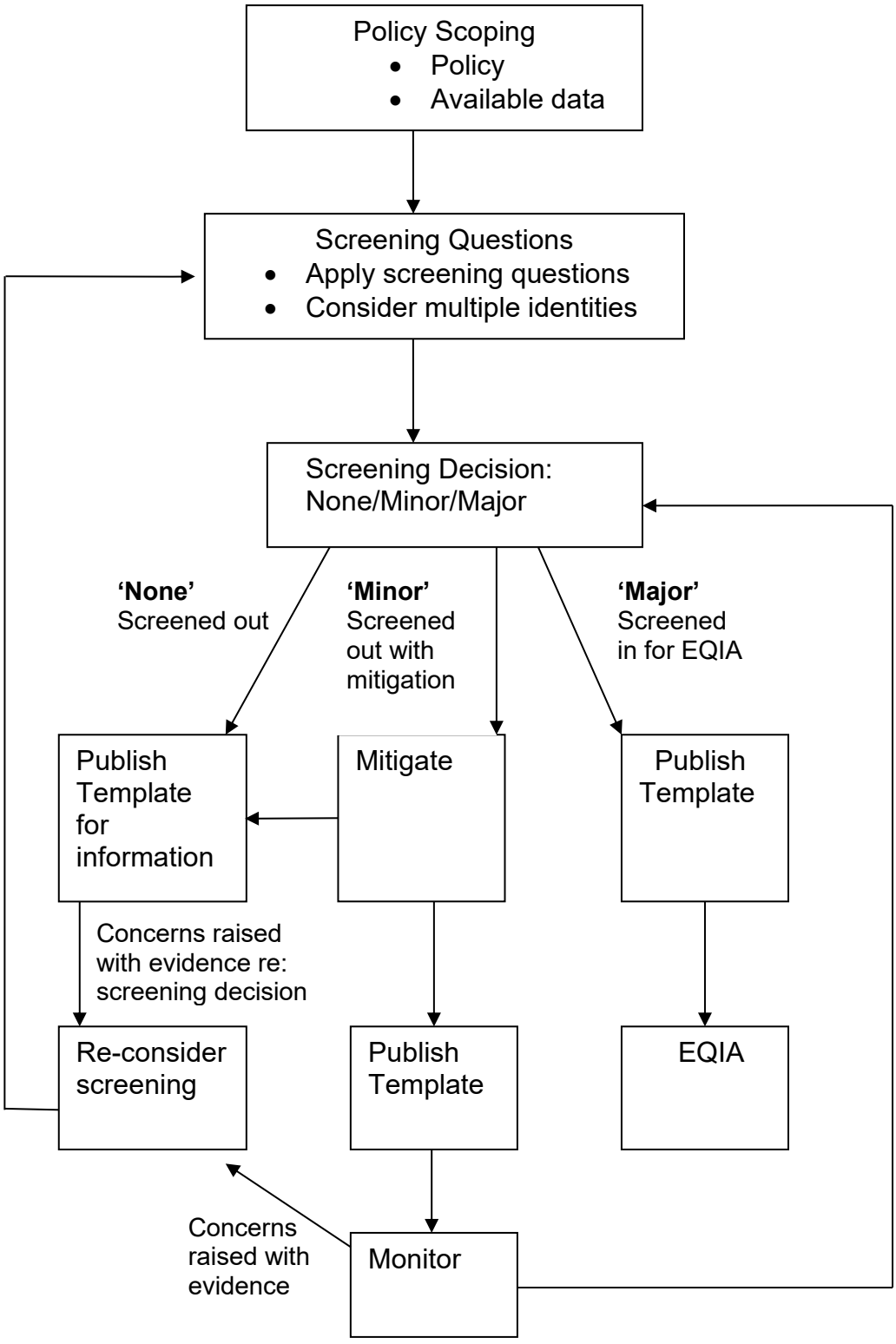
Part 3. Screening decision – guides the public authority to reach a screening decision as to whether or not there is a need to carry out an equality impact assessment (EQIA), or to introduce measures to mitigate the likely impact, or the introduction of an alternative policy to better promote equality of opportunity and/or good relations.

Part 4. Monitoring – provides guidance to public authorities on monitoring for adverse impact and broader monitoring.

Part 5. Consideration of Human Rights – please note this is not a Human Rights Screening form but rather a prompt that impacts on Human Rights should be considered.

Part 6. Approval and authorisation – verifies the public authority's approval of a screening decision by a senior manager responsible for the policy.

A screening flowchart is provided below.



Part 1. Policy scoping

The first stage of the screening process involves scoping the policy under consideration. The purpose of policy scoping is to help prepare the background and context and set out the aims and objectives for the policy, being screened. At this stage, scoping the policy will help identify potential constraints as well as opportunities and will help the policy maker work through the screening process on a step by step basis.

Public authorities should remember that the Section 75 statutory duties apply to internal policies (relating to people who work for the authority), as well as external policies (relating to those who are, or could be, served by the authority).

Information about the policy

Name of the policy

A proposal to introduce a ban on specific aversive training devices

Is this an existing, revised or new policy?

New policy

What is it trying to achieve? (intended aims/outcomes)

Aversive training devices are designed to use discomfort, pain or fear to train pets, on the principle of applying an unpleasant stimulus to stop or prevent unwanted behaviour. These devices have the potential to cause both physical and psychological suffering. In Northern Ireland, the use and sale of e-collars is currently legal but subject to the general provisions of The Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, which places a duty on people to ensure they take reasonable steps to meet the welfare needs of animals for which they are responsible. This includes

protecting animals from unnecessary suffering, pain and injury. Therefore, if an e-collar is used in a manner that causes pain, fear or distress to an animal, the user could be liable for prosecution under the 2011 Act.

The overall aim of this policy is to introduce a ban on the use of specific aversive training devices, namely handheld e-collars, choke chains and prong collars in Northern Ireland. This policy will help improve animal welfare in Northern Ireland.

Are there any Section 75 categories which might be expected to benefit from the intended policy? ☐ Yes ☒ No (select as appropriate)

If so, explain how.

Who initiated or wrote the policy?

The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs.

Who owns and who implements the policy?

The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs.

Implementation factors

Are there any factors which could contribute to/detract from the intended aim/outcome of the policy/decision? ☒ Yes ☐ No (select as appropriate)

If yes, are they (please select as appropriate)

Financial ☐

Legislative ☒

other, please specify:

The policy will be laid through the powers in the Animal Welfare (Northern Ireland) Act 2011. The policy is included in Minister Muirs Animal Welfare Pathway 2025-27.

Main stakeholders affected

Who are the internal and external stakeholders (actual or potential) that the policy will impact upon? (please select as appropriate)

Staff ☐

Service users ☐

Other public sector organisations ☒

Voluntary/community/trade unions ☒

Other, please specify

Other policies with a bearing on this policy

What are they?

N/A

Who owns them?

N/A

Available evidence

Evidence to help inform the screening process may take many forms. Public authorities should ensure that their screening decision is informed by relevant data. The Commission has produced this guide to signpost to S75 data.

What evidence/information (both qualitative and quantitative) have you gathered to inform this policy? Specify details for each of the Section 75 categories.

Please ensure all data used is the most current and up to date available. You should verify this by contacting the Departmental Statisticians.

Religious belief evidence/information:

There is no evidence to suggest that the revised policy will impact negatively on people in this category.
Northern Ireland's 2021 Census shows Catholics as the largest religious group (42.31%), followed by Presbyterians (16.61%), Church of Ireland (11.55%) and Methodists (2.35%), with others identifying as other Christians (6.85%), other religions (1.34%), no religion (17.39%), or not stating a religion (1.60%).
The PDSA PAW Report 2022 surveyed 5,768 pet owners. They used the information to estimate a total of 10.2 million dogs and 11.1 million cats in the UK. The majority of owners (86%) confirmed they had made use of a training device on their dog, with 20% of dog owners admitted to using an aversive training device. No religious belief was surveyed in the gathering of statistics.
The Dogs Trust's National Dog Survey 2025 received 6,512 responses, including 2% from Northern Ireland. Respondents were predominantly aged 45–74, female, White British, homeowners, and living in two-adult households; 19% included children. No data on religious belief was collected.

The upcoming public consultation will allow both individuals and organisations to share their perspectives. Any matters pertaining to religious beliefs that arise during the consultation will be thoroughly evaluated when determining the final policy proposal.

Political Opinion evidence/information:

There is no evidence to suggest that the revised policy will impact negatively on people in this category.
The 2024 NI Life & Times survey shows the political outlook in Northern Ireland, with 30% identifying as unionist, 30% as nationalist, and the largest share (35%) identifying as neither, while small minorities selected another answer (2%) or said they did not know (3%).
The PDSA PAW Report 2022 surveyed 5,768 pet owners. They used the information to estimate a total of 10.2 million dogs and 11.1 million cats in the UK. The majority of owners (86%) confirmed they had made use of a training device on their dog, with 20% of dog owners admitted to using an aversive training device. No political opinion was surveyed in the gathering of statistics.
The Dogs Trust's National Dog Survey 2025 received 6,512 responses, including 2% from Northern Ireland. Respondents were predominantly aged 45–74, female, White British, homeowners, and living in two-adult households; 19% included children. No data on political opinion was collected.
The upcoming public consultation will allow both individuals and organisations to share their perspectives. Any matters pertaining to political opinion that arise during the consultation will be thoroughly evaluated when determining the final policy proposal.

Racial Group evidence/information:

There is no evidence to suggest that the revised policy will impact negatively on people in this category.

Northern Ireland's 2021 Census shows a population of approximately 97% identifying as White, while minority ethnic groups together account for about 3% of the population; the largest of these are Indian and Chinese communities (around 0.5% each), Mixed ethnicities (0.8%), and Black ethnic groups (around 0.6%).

The PDSA PAW Report 2022 surveyed 5,768 pet owners. They used the information to estimate a total of 10.2 million dogs and 11.1 million cats in the UK. The majority of owners (86%) confirmed they had made use of a training device on their dog, with 20% of dog owners admitted to using an aversive training device. No racial information was surveyed in the gathering of statistics.

The Dogs Trust's National Dog Survey 2025 received 6,512 responses, including 2% from Northern Ireland. Respondents predominantly identified as White British.

The upcoming public consultation will allow both individuals and organisations to share their perspectives. Any matters pertaining racial group that arise during the consultation will be thoroughly evaluated when determining the final policy proposal.

Age evidence/information:

There is no evidence to suggest that the revised policy will impact negatively on people in this category.

Based on Northern Ireland's Census 2021, the population age profile can be summarised as follows: 25.14% of the population are aged 0–19 years, 25.28% are 20–39 years, 26.48% are 40–59 years, 18.73% are 60–79 years,

and 4.37% are aged 80 years and over, illustrating a broadly even distribution across the working-age groups with a smaller proportion in the oldest age category.

The PDSA PAW Report 2022 surveyed 5,768 pet owners. They used the information to estimate a total of 10.2 million dogs and 11.1 million cats in the UK. The majority of owners (86%) confirmed they had made use of a training device on their dog, with 20% of dog owners admitted to using an aversive training device. No age group data was surveyed in the gathering of statistics.

The Dogs Trust's National Dog Survey 2025 received 6,512 responses, including 2% from Northern Ireland. Respondents were predominantly aged 45–74 (64% of respondents).

The upcoming public consultation will allow both individuals and organisations to share their perspectives. Any matters pertaining to age that arise during the consultation will be thoroughly evaluated when determining the final policy proposal.

Marital Status evidence/information:

There is no evidence to suggest that the revised policy will impact negatively on people in this category.

Northern Ireland's Census 2021 shows that 45.59% of the population are married, while 38.07% are single (never married or never in a civil partnership); smaller proportions are divorced (6.02%), widowed or surviving a civil partner (6.36%), separated (3.78%), and in a civil partnership (0.18%).

The PDSA PAW Report 2022 surveyed 5,768 pet owners. They used the information to estimate a total of 10.2 million dogs and 11.1 million cats in the UK. The majority of owners (86%) confirmed they had made use of a training device on their dog, with 20% of dog owners admitted to using an aversive

training device. No marital status data was surveyed in the gathering of statistics.

The Dogs Trust's National Dog Survey 2025[1] indicates that 6,512 people from Northern Ireland responded to its survey about dogs. The survey did not include information about marital status.

The upcoming public consultation will allow both individuals and organisations to share their perspectives. Any matters pertaining to marital status that arise during the consultation will be thoroughly evaluated when determining the final policy proposal.

Sexual Orientation evidence/information:

There is no evidence to suggest that the revised policy will impact negatively on people in this category.

Northern Ireland's Census 2021 shows that the vast majority of the population identify as straight or heterosexual (90.04%), while 2.09% identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or another sexual orientation, and 7.87% either preferred not to say or did not state their sexual orientation.

The PDSA PAW Report 2022 surveyed 5,768 pet owners. They used the information to estimate a total of 10.2 million dogs and 11.1 million cats in the UK. The majority of owners (86%) confirmed they had made use of a training device on their dog, with 20% of dog owners admitted to using an aversive training device. No sexual orientation data was surveyed in the gathering of statistics.

The Dogs Trust's National Dog Survey 2025[2] indicates that 6,512 people from Northern Ireland responded to its survey about dogs. The survey did not include information about sexual orientation.

[1] NDS 2025 State of the nation report desktop version.pdf
[2] NDS 2025 State of the nation report desktop version.pdf

The upcoming public consultation will allow both individuals and organisations to share their perspectives. Any matters pertaining to sexual orientation that arise during the consultation will be thoroughly evaluated when determining the final policy proposal.

Men & Women generally evidence/information:

There is no evidence to suggest that the revised policy will impact negatively on people in this category.
Northern Ireland's Census 2021 shows that the population is almost evenly split by sex, with females accounting for 50.81% of the population and males 49.19%.
The PDSA PAW Report 2022 surveyed 5,768 pet owners. They used the information to estimate a total of 10.2 million dogs and 11.1 million cats in the UK. The majority of owners (86%) confirmed they had made use of a training device on their dog, with 20% of dog owners admitted to using an aversive training device. No gender data was surveyed in the gathering of statistics.
The Dogs Trust's National Dog Survey 2025[3] indicates that 6,512 people from Northern Ireland responded to its survey about dogs. The survey indicates: responses were received from participants across all four nations of the UK, 2% of whom were from Northern Ireland, broadly reflecting the UK population distribution, and the majority identified as female (80%).
The upcoming public consultation will allow both individuals and organisations to share their perspectives. Any matters pertaining to gender that arise during the consultation will be thoroughly evaluated when determining the final policy proposal.

Disability evidence/information:

[3] NDS 2025 State of the nation report desktop version.pdf

There is no evidence to suggest that the revised policy will impact negatively on people in this category.

Northern Ireland's Census 2021 shows that 55.14% of households have no residents with a limiting long-term health problem or disability, while 33.63% have one resident with a limiting condition and 11.23% have two or more residents.

The PDSA PAW Report 2022 surveyed 5,768 pet owners. They used the information to estimate a total of 10.2 million dogs and 11.1 million cats in the UK. The majority of owners (86%) confirmed they had made use of a training device on their dog, with 20% of dog owners admitted to using an aversive training device. No disability data was surveyed in the gathering of statistics.

The Dogs Trust's National Dog Survey 2025[4] indicates that 6,512 people from Northern Ireland responded to its survey about dogs. The survey did not include information about sexual orientation.

The upcoming public consultation will allow both individuals and organisations to share their perspectives. Any matters pertaining to disability that arise during the consultation will be thoroughly evaluated and potential mitigations considered and included in final policy as necessary when determining the final policy proposal.

Dependants evidence/information:

There is no evidence to suggest that the revised policy will impact negatively on people in this category.

Northern Ireland's Census 2021 shows that just over half of households (53.15%) have no children, with a further 16.17% having no dependent children, meaning around seven in ten households do not include dependent

[4] NDS 2025 State of the nation report desktop version.pdf

children, while around 30% do; among those with dependent children, households most commonly have one or two children, and larger families are relatively rare, with around 6–7% of households having three or more dependent children.

The PDSA PAW Report 2022 surveyed 5,768 pet owners. They used the information to estimate a total of 10.2 million dogs and 11.1 million cats in the UK. The majority of owners (86%) confirmed they had made use of a training device on their dog, with 20% of dog owners admitted to using an aversive training device. No dependants data was surveyed in the gathering of statistics.

The Dogs Trust's National Dog Survey 2025[5] indicates that 6,512 people from Northern Ireland responded to its survey about dogs. The survey indicates: responses were received from participants across all four nations of the UK, 2% of whom were from Northern Ireland, broadly reflecting the UK population distribution; most households consisted of two adults, and 19% included children.

The upcoming public consultation will allow both individuals and organisations to share their perspectives. Any matters pertaining to dependants that arise during the consultation will be thoroughly evaluated when determining the final policy proposal.

Needs, experiences and priorities

Taking into account the information referred to above, what are the different needs, experiences and priorities of each of the following categories, in relation to the particular policy/decision?

[5] NDS 2025 State of the nation report desktop version.pdf

Specify details of the needs, experiences and priorities for each of the Section 75 categories below:

Religious belief

None - There is no evidence that's shows a link between religious belief and use of aversive training devices

Political Opinion

None - There is no evidence that's shows a link between political opinion and use of aversive training devices

Racial Group

None - There is no evidence that's shows a link between race and use of aversive training devices

Age

None - There is no evidence that's shows a link between age and use of aversive training devices

Marital status

None - There is no evidence that's shows a link between marital status and use of aversive training devices

Sexual orientation

None - There is no evidence that's shows a link between sexual orientation and use of aversive training devices

Men and Women Generally

None - There is no evidence that's shows a link between gender and use of aversive training devices

Disability

None - There is no evidence that's shows a link between disability and use of aversive training devices

Dependants

None - There is no evidence that's shows a link between having dependants and use of aversive training devices

Introduction

In making a decision as to whether or not there is a need to carry out an equality impact assessment, the public authority should consider its answers to the questions 1-4.

If the public authority's conclusion is **none** in respect of all of the Section 75 equality of opportunity and/or good relations categories, then the public authority may decide to screen the policy out. If a policy is 'screened out' as having no relevance to equality of opportunity or good relations, a public authority should give details of the reasons for the decision taken.

If the public authority's conclusion is **major** in respect of one or more of the Section 75 equality of opportunity and/or good relations categories, then consideration should be given to subjecting the policy to the equality impact assessment procedure.

If the public authority's conclusion is **minor** in respect of one or more of the Section 75 equality categories and/or good relations categories, then consideration should still be given to proceeding with an equality impact assessment, or to:

- measures to mitigate the adverse impact; or
- the introduction of an alternative policy to better promote equality of opportunity and/or good relations.

In favour of a 'major' impact

a) The policy is significant in terms of its strategic importance;
b) Potential equality impacts are unknown, because, for example, there is insufficient data upon which to make an assessment or because they are complex, and it would be appropriate to conduct an equality impact assessment in order to better assess them;
c) Potential equality and/or good relations impacts are likely to be adverse or are likely to be experienced disproportionately by groups of people including those who are marginalised or disadvantaged;
d) Further assessment offers a valuable way to examine the evidence and develop recommendations in respect of a policy about which there are concerns amongst affected individuals and representative groups, for example in respect of multiple identities;
e) The policy is likely to be challenged by way of judicial review;
f) The policy is significant in terms of expenditure.

In favour of 'minor' impact

a) The policy is not unlawfully discriminatory and any residual potential impacts on people are judged to be negligible;
b) The policy, or certain proposals within it, are potentially unlawfully discriminatory, but this possibility can readily and easily be eliminated by making appropriate changes to the policy or by adopting appropriate mitigating measures;
c) Any asymmetrical equality impacts caused by the policy are intentional because they are specifically designed to promote equality of opportunity for particular groups of disadvantaged people;
d) By amending the policy there are better opportunities to better promote equality of opportunity and/or good relations.

In favour of none

1) The policy has no relevance to equality of opportunity or good relations.
2) The policy is purely technical in nature and will have no bearing in terms of its likely impact on equality of opportunity or good relations for people within the equality and good relations categories.

Taking into account the evidence presented above, consider and comment on the likely impact on equality of opportunity and good relations for those affected by this policy, in any way, for each of the equality and good relations categories, by applying the screening questions given overleaf and indicate the level of impact on the group i.e. minor, major or none.

Screening questions

1. **What is the likely impact on equality of opportunity for those affected by this policy, for each of the Section 75 equality categories?** Please provide details of the likely policy impacts and determine the level of impact for each S75 categories below i.e. either minor, major or none.

Details of the likely policy impacts on *Religious belief*:

None – All dog owners regardless of religion will be impacted equally with a ban on specific aversive training devices as no evidence suggests any group uses these devices more than any other.

What is the level of impact? Minor ☐ Major ☐ None ☒
(select as appropriate)

Details of the likely policy impacts on *Political Opinion:*

None – All dog owners regardless of political opinion will be impacted equally with a ban on specific aversive training devices as no evidence suggests any group uses these devices more than any other.

What is the level of impact? Minor ☐ Major ☐ None ☒
(select as appropriate)

Details of the likely policy impacts on *Racial Group*:

None – All dog owners regardless of race will be impacted equally with a ban on specific aversive training devices as no evidence suggests any group uses these devices more than any other.

What is the level of impact? Minor ☐ Major ☐ None ☒
(select as appropriate)

Details of the likely policy impacts on *Age*:

None – All dog owners regardless of age will be impacted equally with a ban on specific aversive training devices as no evidence suggests any group uses these devices more than any other.

What is the level of impact? Minor ☐ Major ☐ None ☒
(select as appropriate)

Details of the likely policy impacts on *Marital Status*:

None – All dog owners regardless of marital status will be impacted equally with a ban on specific aversive training devices as no evidence suggests any group uses these devices more than any other.

What is the level of impact? Minor ☐ Major ☐ None ☒
(select as appropriate)

Details of the likely policy impacts on *Sexual Orientation*:

None – All dog owners regardless of sexual orientation will be impacted equally with a ban on specific aversive training devices as no evidence suggests any group uses these devices more than any other.

What is the level of impact Minor ☐ Major ☐ None ☒
(select as appropriate)

Details of the likely policy impacts on *Men and Women*:

None – All dog owners regardless of gender will be impacted equally with a ban on specific aversive training devices as no evidence suggests any group uses these devices more than any other.

What is the level of impact? Minor ☐ Major ☐ None ☒
(select as appropriate)

Details of the likely policy impacts on *Disability*:

None – All dog owners regardless of disability status will be impacted equally with a ban on specific aversive training devices as no evidence suggests any group uses these devices more than any other.

What is the level of impact? Minor ☐ Major ☐ None ☒
(select as appropriate)

Details of the likely policy impacts on *Dependants*:

None – All dog owners regardless of having dependants or not will be impacted equally with a ban on specific aversive training devices as no evidence suggests any group uses these devices more than any other.

What is the level of impact? ☐ Major ☐ None ☒
(select as appropriate)

2. **Are there opportunities to better promote equality of opportunity for people within the Section 75 equalities categories?**

☐ Yes ☒ No (select as appropriate)

Detail opportunities of how this policy could promote equality of

opportunity for people within each of the Section 75 Categories below:

Religious Belief **- If Yes, provide details:**

N/A

If No, provide reasons:

There is no impact envisaged on, or opportunity to promote equality of opportunity for people within this category. However, the proposed reforms will be subject to a public consultation, and the responses to the consultation will be monitored to inform the position.

Political Opinion **- If Yes, provide details:**

N/A

If No, provide reasons:

There is no impact envisaged on, or opportunity to promote equality of opportunity for people within this category. However, the proposed reforms will be subject to a public consultation, and the responses to the consultation will be monitored to inform the position.

Racial Group **- If Yes, provide details:**

N/A

If No, provide reasons:

There is no impact envisaged on, or opportunity to promote equality of opportunity for people within this category. However, the proposed

reforms will be subject to a public consultation, and the responses to the consultation will be monitored to inform the position.

Age **- If Yes, provide details:**

N/A

If No, provide reasons:

There is no impact envisaged on, or opportunity to promote equality of opportunity for people within this category. However, the proposed reforms will be subject to a public consultation, and the responses to the consultation will be monitored to inform the position.

Marital Status **- If Yes, provide details:**

N/A

If No, provide reasons

There is no impact envisaged on, or opportunity to promote equality of opportunity for people within this category. However, the proposed reforms will be subject to a public consultation, and the responses to the consultation will be monitored to inform the position.

Sexual Orientation **- If Yes, provide details:**

N/A

If No, provide reasons:

There is no impact envisaged on, or opportunity to promote equality of opportunity for people within this category. However, the proposed

reforms will be subject to a public consultation, and the responses to the consultation will be monitored to inform the position.

Men and Women generally **- If Yes, provide details:**

N/A

If No, provide reasons:

There is no impact envisaged on, or opportunity to promote equality of opportunity for people within this category. However, the proposed reforms will be subject to a public consultation, and the responses to the consultation will be monitored to inform the position.

Disability **- If Yes, provide details:**

N/A

If No, provide reasons:

There is no impact envisaged on, or opportunity to promote equality of opportunity for people within this category. However, the proposed reforms will be subject to a public consultation, and the responses to the consultation will be monitored to inform the position.

Dependants **- If Yes, provide details:**

N/A

If No, provide reasons:

There is no impact envisaged on, or opportunity to promote equality of opportunity for people within this category. However, the proposed

reforms will be subject to a public consultation, and the responses to the consultation will be monitored to inform the position.

3. **To what extent is the policy likely to impact on good relations between people of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group?**

Please provide details of the likely policy impact and determine the level of impact for each of the categories below i.e. either minor, major or none.

Details of the likely policy impacts on *Religious belief*:

None - All dog owners regardless of religious belief will be impacted equally with a ban on specific aversive training devices as no evidence suggests any religious group uses these devices more than any other or that it is linked to religious beliefs.

What is the level of impact? Minor ☐ Major ☐ None ☒
(select as appropriate)

Details of the likely policy impacts on *Political Opinion*:

None - All dog owners regardless of political opinion will be impacted equally with a ban on specific aversive training devices as no evidence suggests any political group uses these devices more than any other or that it is linked to political opinions.

What is the level of impact? Minor ☐ Major ☐ None ☒
(select as appropriate)

Details of the likely policy impacts on *Racial Group*:

None - All dog owners regardless of race will be impacted equally with a ban on specific aversive training devices as no evidence suggests any racial group uses these devices more than any other.

What is the level of impact? Minor ☐ Major ☐ None ☒
(select as appropriate)

4. **Are there opportunities to better promote good relations between people of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group?**

Detail opportunities of how this policy could better promote good relations for people within each of the Section 75 Categories below:

***Religious Belief* - If Yes, provide details:**

N/A

If No, provide reasons:

The Department has not identified any evidence to indicate such opportunities. However, the responses to the consultation will be monitored to inform the position.

***Political Opinion* - If Yes, provide details:**

N/A

If No, provide reasons:

The Department has not identified any evidence to indicate such opportunities. However, the responses to the consultation will be monitored to inform the position.

***Racial Group* - If Yes, provide details:**

N/A

If No, provide reasons:

The Department has not identified any evidence to indicate such opportunities. However, the responses to the consultation will be monitored to inform the position.

Additional considerations

Multiple identity

Generally speaking, people can fall into more than one Section 75 category. Taking this into consideration, are there any potential impacts of the policy/decision on people with multiple identities? If so, please detail below.

(For example; disabled minority ethnic people; disabled women; young Protestant men; and young lesbians, gay and bisexual people).

Provide details of data on the impact of the policy on people with multiple identities. Specify relevant Section 75 categories concerned.

There is no available evidence to indicate potential impacts on people with multiple identities. However, the responses to the consultation will be monitored to inform the position.

DAERA also has legislative obligations to meet under the **Disability Discrimination Order**. Questions 5 - 6 relate to these.

Consideration of Disability Duties

5. **Does this proposed policy or decision provide an opportunity for DAERA to better *promote positive attitudes* towards disabled people?**

The proposed policy would apply equally to all stakeholders. It is not anticipated that it will provide an opportunity to promote positive attitudes towards people with a disability. However, the responses to the consultation will be monitored to inform the position.

6. **Does this proposed policy or decision provide an opportunity to actively *increase the participation* by disabled people in public life?**

The proposed policy does not provide an opportunity to actively increase the participation by disabled people in public life. However, the responses to the consultation will be monitored to inform the position.

Part 3. Screening decision (Please delete as appropriate)

"Screened out" without mitigation or an alternative policy proposed to be adopted.

If the decision is *not to conduct an equality impact assessment*, please provide details of the reasons.

The policy will apply to all persons who keep companion pets, equally. An Equality and Human Rights Screening Exercise has been undertaken, which assessed evidence relating to s75 considerations, including equality of opportunity and good relations, and Disability Duties and Human Rights. The exercise has concluded that the policy would apply equally to all stakeholders.

If the decision is not to conduct an equality impact assessment the public authority should consider if the policy should *be mitigated or an alternative policy be introduced* - please provide details.

N/A. No mitigations or alternatives are needed. The policy will apply to all companion pet owners equally. A public consultation will however invite comments on the proposals, and on this Equality and Human Rights Screening Exercise, and responses will be monitored to further inform the position.

If the decision is to *subject the policy to an equality impact assessment*, please provide details of the reasons.

N/A

All public authorities' equality schemes must state the authority's arrangements for assessing and consulting on the likely impact of policies adopted or

proposed to be adopted by the authority on the promotion of equality of opportunity. The Commission recommends screening and equality impact assessment as the tools to be utilised for such assessments. Further advice on equality impact assessment may be found in a separate Commission publication: A Practical Guide to Equality Impact Assessment

Mitigation

When the public authority concludes that the likely impact is 'minor' and an equality impact assessment is not to be conducted, the public authority may consider mitigation to lessen the severity of any equality impact, or the introduction of an alternative policy to better promote equality of opportunity or good relations.

Can the policy/decision be amended or changed or an alternative policy introduced to better promote equality of opportunity and/or good relations? ☐ **Yes** ☒ **No** (select as appropriate)

If so, *give the reasons* to support your decision, together with the proposed changes/amendments or alternative policy.

N/A

Timetabling and prioritising

Factors to be considered in timetabling and prioritising policies for equality impact assessment.

If the policy has been 'screened in' for equality impact assessment, then please answer the following questions to determine its priority for timetabling the equality impact assessment.

On a scale of 1-3, with 1 being the lowest priority and 3 being the highest, assess the policy in terms of its priority for equality impact assessment.

Priority criterion	Rating (1-3)
Effect on equality of opportunity and good relations	N/A
Social need	N/A
Effect on people's daily lives	N/A
Relevance to a public authority's functions	N/A
Total score	N/A

Note: The Total Rating Score should be used to prioritise the policy in rank order with other policies screened in for equality impact assessment. This list of priorities will assist the public authority in timetabling. Details of the Public Authority's Equality Impact Assessment Timetable should be included in the quarterly Screening Report.

Is the policy affected by timetables established by other relevant public authorities? ☐ Yes ☒ No (select as appropriate)

If yes, please provide details.

N/A

Part 4. Monitoring

Section 75 places a requirement on DAERA to have equality monitoring arrangements in place in order to assess the impact of policies and services etc; and to help identify barriers to fair participation and to better promote equality of opportunity. Please note the following excerpt from The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland in relation to monitoring:

A system must be established to monitor the impact of the policy in order to find out its effect on relevant groups. The results of ongoing monitoring must be reviewed on an annual basis. The public authority is required to publish the results of this monitoring. And they must be included in the public authorities´ annual review on progress to the Equality Commission. The Equality Scheme must specify how and where such monitoring information will be published. It is therefore essential that monitoring is carried out in a systematic manner and that the results are widely and openly published.

If the monitoring and analysis of results over a two year period show that the policy results in greater adverse impact than predicted, or if opportunities arise which would allow for greater equality of opportunity to be promoted, the public authority must ensure that the policy is revised to achieve better outcomes for the relevant equality groups.

Further advice on monitoring can be found at: ECNI Monitoring Guidance for Public Authorities

Outline what data you will collect in the future in order to monitor the impact of this policy or decision on equality, good relations and disability duties.

Equality:

The Department will monitor feedback through the public consultation, including any evidence relating to equality impacts and will consider and evaluate prior to finalising the policy. If, or when, legislation is introduced, the Department will monitor impacts through engagement with councils during implementation.

Good Relations:

The Department will monitor feedback through the public consultation, including any evidence relating to equality impacts and will consider and evaluate prior to finalising the policy. If, or when, legislation is introduced, the Department will monitor impacts through engagement with councils during implementation.

Disability Duties:

The Department will monitor feedback through the public consultation, including any evidence relating to equality impacts and will consider and evaluate prior to finalising the policy. If, or when, legislation is introduced, the Department will monitor impacts through engagement with councils during implementation.

Part 5. Consideration of Human Rights

7. **The Human Rights Act (HRA) 1998 brings the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) into UK law and it applies in N Ireland. Indicate below by deleting Yes/No as appropriate, any potential *adverse impacts* that the policy or decision may have in relation to human rights issues.**

See Annex A for brief synopsis on each of the Human Rights Articles & Protocols.

Right to Life	**Article 2**	~~Yes~~/No
Prohibition of torture, inhuman or degrading treatment	**Article 3**	~~Yes~~/No
Prohibition of slavery and forced labour	**Article 4**	~~Yes~~/No
Right to liberty and security	**Article 5**	~~Yes~~/No
Right to a fair and public trial	**Article 6**	~~Yes~~/No
Right to no punishment without law	**Article 7**	~~Yes~~/No
Right to respect for private and family life, home and correspondence	**Article 8**	~~Yes~~/No
Right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion	**Article 9**	~~Yes~~/No
Right to freedom of expression	**Article 10**	~~Yes~~/No
Right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association	**Article 11**	~~Yes~~/No
Right to marry and to found a family	**Article 12**	~~Yes~~/No
The prohibition of discrimination	**Article 14**	~~Yes~~/No
Protection of property and enjoyment of possessions	**Protocol 1 Article 1**	~~Yes~~/No

Right to education	**Protocol 1 Article 2**	~~Yes~~/No
Right to free and secret elections	**Protocol 1 Article 3**	~~Yes~~/No

8. **Please explain any adverse impacts on human rights that you have identified.**

No adverse impact on human rights has been identified.

9. **Please indicate any ways which you consider the policy positively promotes human rights.**

No ways to positively promote human rights have been identified.

Part 6 - Approval and authorisation

Before signing off this screening template please confirm that you have completed all the actions listed below.

I can confirm that all the actions listed below have been completed -

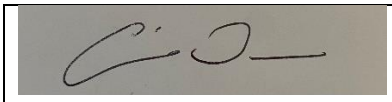
- I have explained any technical issues in plain English (easily understood by a 12 year old)
- I have used the most relevant, current & up to date data available
- I have added evidence and explained my assessments in full
- I have provided a brief note to justify my decision to ‘Screen In’ or ‘Screen Out’
- A copy of this screening template and the final decision has been sent to the Equality Unit for their consideration before it has been forwarded for sign-off

Screening assessment completed by (Staff Officer level or above) -

Name: **Chris Wade** **Grade: DP**

Branch: **Animal Welfare and Dog Control Policy Branch** **Date: 12 March 2026**

Signature: please insert a scanned image of your signature.

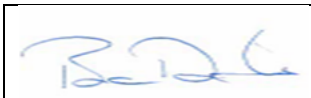


Screening decision approved by (must be Grade 3/Deputy Secretary or above) -

Name: Brian Dooher **Grade: 3**

Branch: VSAHG **Date: 16/4/26**

Signature: please insert a scanned image of your signature.



Note: A copy of the Screening Template, for each policy screened should be 'signed off' and approved by a senior manager responsible for the policy, made easily accessible on the public authority's website as soon as possible following completion and made available on request.

Please save the final signed version of the completed screening form in the CM container (AE2-19-11940) below as soon as possible after completion and forward the CM link to Equality Branch at equality@daera-ni.gov.uk. The screening template must be saved to the container in **HTML format** (not PDF) in order to comply with accessibility requirements. The screening form will be placed on the DAERA website and a link provided to the Department's Section 75 consultees.

Strategic
Management DAERA

For more information about equality screening, contact:

DAERA Equality Unit

Capacity, Capability, Equality & Diversity Branch

Jubilee House

111 Ballykelly Road

LIMAVADY

BT49 9HP

Email: equality@daera-ni.gov.uk

Tel: 028 7744 2027

Annex A

Synopsis of Human Rights Act Articles & Protocols

ARTICLE 2

Right to life

1. Everyone's right to life shall be protected by law. No one shall be deprived of his life intentionally save in the execution of a sentence of a court following his conviction of a crime for which this penalty is provided by law.
2. Deprivation of life shall not be regarded as inflicted in contravention of this Article when it results from the use of force which is no more than absolutely necessary:
    a. In defense of any person from unlawful violence;
    b. In order to effect a lawful arrest or to prevent the escape of a person lawfully detained;
    c. In action lawfully taken for the purpose of quelling a riot or insurrection.

ARTICLE 3

Prohibition of torture

No one shall be subjected to torture or to inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

ARTICLE 4

Prohibition of slavery and forced labour

1. No one shall be held in slavery or servitude.
2. No one shall be required to perform forced or compulsory labour.
3. For the purpose of this Article the term “forced or compulsory labour” shall not include:
    a. Any work required to be done in the ordinary course of detention imposed according to the provisions of Article 5 of this Convention or during conditional release from such detention;
    b. Any service of a military character or, in case of conscientious objectors in countries where they are recognised, service exacted instead of compulsory military service;
    c. Any service exacted in case of an emergency or calamity threatening the life or well-being of the community;
    d. Any work or service which forms part of normal civic obligations.

ARTICLE 5

Right to liberty and security

1. Everyone has the right to liberty and security of person. No one shall be deprived of his liberty save in the following cases and in accordance with a procedure prescribed by law:
    a. The lawful detention of a person after conviction by a competent court;
    b. The lawful arrest or detention of a person for non-compliance with the lawful order of a court or in order to secure the fulfilment of any obligation prescribed by law;
    c. the lawful arrest or detention of a person effected for the purpose of bringing him before the competent legal authority on reasonable

suspicion of having committed an offence or when it is reasonably considered necessary to prevent his committing an offence or fleeing after having done so;

d. the detention of a minor by lawful order for the purpose of educational supervision or his lawful detention for the purpose of bringing him before the competent legal authority;
e. The lawful detention of persons for the prevention of the spreading of infectious diseases, of persons of unsound mind, alcoholics or drug addicts or vagrants;
f. The lawful arrest or detention of a person to prevent his effecting an unauthorised entry into the country or of a person against whom action is being taken with a view to deportation or extradition.

2. Everyone who is arrested shall be informed promptly, in a language which he understands, of the reasons for his arrest and of any charge against him.
3. Everyone arrested or detained in accordance with the provisions of paragraph 1(c) of this Article shall be brought promptly before a judge or other officer authorised by law to exercise judicial power and shall be entitled to trial within a reasonable time or to release pending trial. Release may be conditioned by guarantees to appear for trial.
4. Everyone who is deprived of his liberty by arrest or detention shall be entitled to take proceedings by which the lawfulness of his detention shall be decided speedily by a court and his release ordered if the detention is not lawful.
5. Everyone who has been the victim of arrest or detention in contravention of the provisions of this Article shall have an enforceable right to compensation.

ARTICLE 6

Right to a fair trial

1. In the determination of his civil rights and obligations or of any criminal charge against him, everyone is entitled to a fair and public hearing within a reasonable time by an independent and impartial tribunal established by law. Judgment shall be pronounced publicly but the press and public may be excluded from all or part of the trial in the interest of morals, public order or national security in a democratic society, where the interests of juveniles or the protection of the private life of the parties so require, or to the extent strictly necessary in the opinion of the court in special circumstances where publicity would prejudice the interests of justice.
2. Everyone charged with a criminal offence shall be presumed innocent until proved guilty according to law.
3. Everyone charged with a criminal offence has the following minimum rights:
    a. To be informed promptly, in a language which he understands and in detail, of the nature and cause of the accusation against him;
    b. To have adequate time and facilities for the preparation of his defense;
    c. To defend himself in person or through legal assistance of his own choosing or, if he has not sufficient means to pay for legal assistance, to be given it free when the interests of justice so require;
    d. To examine or have examined witnesses against him and to obtain the attendance and examination of witnesses on his behalf under the same conditions as witnesses against him;
    e. To have the free assistance of an interpreter if he cannot understand or speak the language used in court.

ARTICLE 7

No punishment without law

1. No one shall be held guilty of any criminal offence on account of any act or omission which did not constitute a criminal offence under national or international law at the time when it was committed. Nor shall a heavier penalty be imposed than the one that was applicable at the time the criminal offence was committed.
2. This Article shall not prejudice the trial and punishment of any person for any act or omission which, at the time when it was committed, was criminal according to the general principles of law recognised by civilised nations.

ARTICLE 8

Right to respect for private and family life

1. Everyone has the right to respect for his private and family life, his home and his correspondence.
2. There shall be no interference by a public authority with the exercise of this right except such as is in accordance with the law and is necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security, public safety or the economic well-being of the country, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.

ARTICLE 9

Freedom of thought, conscience and religion

1. Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief, in worship, teaching, practice and observance.
2. Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs shall be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of public safety, for the protection of public order, health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.

ARTICLE 10

Freedom of expression

1. Everyone has the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers. This Article shall not prevent States from requiring the licensing of broadcasting, television or cinema enterprises.
2. The exercise of these freedoms, since it carries with it duties and responsibilities, may be subject to such formalities, conditions, restrictions or penalties as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society, in the interests of national security, territorial integrity or public safety, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals, for the protection of the reputation or rights of others, for preventing the disclosure of information received in confidence, or for maintaining the authority and impartiality of the judiciary.

ARTICLE 11

Freedom of assembly and association

1. Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and to freedom of association with others, including the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his interests.
2. No restrictions shall be placed on the exercise of these rights other than such as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security or public safety, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others. This Article shall not prevent the imposition of lawful restrictions on the exercise of these rights by members of the armed forces, of the police or of the administration of the State.

ARTICLE 12

Right to marry

Men and women of marriageable age have the right to marry and to found a family, according to the national laws governing the exercise of this right.

ARTICLE 14

Prohibition of discrimination

The enjoyment of the rights and freedoms set forth in this Convention shall be secured without discrimination on any ground such as sex, race, colour, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth or other status.

Protocol 1

ARTICLE 1

Protection of property

Every natural or legal person is entitled to the peaceful enjoyment of his possessions. No one shall be deprived of his possessions except in the public interest and subject to the conditions provided for by law and by the general principles of international law.

The preceding provisions shall not, however, in any way impair the right of a State to enforce such laws as it deems necessary to control the use of property in accordance with the general interest or to secure the payment of taxes or other contributions or penalties.

Protocol 1

ARTICLE 2

Right to education

No person shall be denied the right to education. In the exercise of any functions which it assumes in relation to education and to teaching, the State shall respect the right of parents to ensure such education and teaching in conformity with their own religious and philosophical convictions.

Protocol 1

ARTICLE 3

Right to free elections

The High Contracting Parties undertake to hold free elections at reasonable intervals by secret ballot, under conditions which will ensure the free expression of the opinion of the people in the choice of the legislature.

For further information:

Equality Unit,
Equality & Diversity Branch
Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA)
Jubilee House
111 Ballykelly Road
Ballykelly
Limavady
BT49 9HP

Tel: 028 7744 2027
Email: equality@daera-ni.gov.uk

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Title: Proposal to ban specific aversive training devices for cats and dogs in Northern Ireland.	**Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA)**
	Date: April 2026
	Type of measure: Secondary Legislation
Lead department or agency: Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA/the Department)	**Stage:**Initial
	Source of intervention: Domestic NI
Other departments or agencies: N/A	**Contact details:** Animal Welfare and Dog Control Policy Branch
	Animal Welfare and Dog Control Policy Branch DAERA Jubilee House 111 Ballykelly Road Limavady BT49 9HP
	animalwelfarepolicy@daera-ni.gov.uk

Summary Intervention and Options

What is the problem under consideration? Why is government intervention necessary? (7 lines maximum)
Aversive training devices such as handheld electronic shock collars, choke collars and prong collars are currently lawful in Northern Ireland, however scientific evidence demonstrates that handheld electronic collars, choke collars and prong collars present significant risks to animal welfare without providing training benefits beyond those achieved through positive reinforcement methods. These devices pose the greatest risk of intentional misuse and direct harm to animal welfare. Section nine of the Welfare of Animals Act places responsibility on the responsible person to ensure the animals welfare. Allowing continued use of electric shock collars, prong collars and chock collars is inconsistent with this, given the scientific evidence. Government intervention therefore required to prevent unnecessary suffering and align Northern Ireland with emerging welfare standards adopted in other jurisdictions.

What are the policy objectives and the intended effects? (7 lines maximum)
The objective of the policy is to improve the welfare of cats and dogs by prohibiting the use of aversive training devices that present the highest risk of harm and misuse. The intended effect is to reduce pain, stress and behavioural harm, promote reward-based training methods and strengthen owner accountability.

What policy options have been considered, including any alternatives to regulation? Please justify preferred option (further details in Evidence Base) (10 lines maximum)

The following options were considered:
- **Option 1** – Do nothing and rely on existing animal welfare legislation
- **Option 2** – Issue guidance discouraging aversive devices
- **Option 3A** – Ban handheld e-collars and containment fence systems
- **Option 3B** – Ban handheld e-collars, choke collars and prong collars *(preferred option)*
- **Option 4** – Comprehensive ban on all aversive devices

Option 3B is the preferred option as it targets devices with the highest welfare risk, aligns with emerging EU standards and maintains proportionate flexibility for responsible pet ownership.

Will the policy be reviewed? It will be reviewed	**If applicable, set review date:** March 2031

Cost of Preferred (or more likely) Option

Total outlay cost for business £m	**Total net cost to business per year** £m	**Annual cost for implementation by Regulator** £m

Does Implementation go beyond minimum EU requirements?			**YES** ☒	**NO** ☐
Is this measure likely to impact on trade and investment?			**YES** ☐	**NO** ☒
Are any of these organisations in scope?	**Micro** Yes ☒ No ☐	**Small** Yes ☒ No ☐	**Medium** Yes ☒ No ☐	**Large** Yes ☒ No ☐

The final RIA supporting legislation must be attached to the Explanatory Memorandum and published with it.
Approved by: Date:

Summary: Analysis and Evidence — Policy Option 1

Description: Do nothing and rely on existing animal welfare legislation

ECONOMIC ASSESSMENT (Option 1 – Do nothing**)**

Costs (£m)	**Total Transitional (Policy)** (constant price)	Years	**Average Annual (recurring)** (excl. transitional) (constant price)	**Total Cost** (Present Value)
Low	**0**		**0**	**0**
High	**0**		**0**	**0**
Best Estimate	**0**		**0**	**0**

Description and scale of key monetised costs by 'main affected groups' Maximum 5 lines

This option would result in no additional monetised costs. There are no new administrative, regulatory, or enforcement expenditures for government, councils, owners, trainers, manufacturers, or retailers.

Other key non-monetised costs by 'main affected groups' Maximum 5 lines

- Continued welfare harm to animals due to the ongoing use and potential misuse of aversive training devices.
- Persistent misuse of devices where existing legislation does not sufficiently deter harmful practices.
- Reputational risk to the Department from perceived inaction, given stated policy intent and ongoing consultation activity in England, and announced regulatory proposals in the Republic of Ireland, following Wales's initial legislative change in 2010.
- Growing divergence from evolving European welfare standards, potentially undermining regional credibility and alignment with best practice.

Benefits (£m)	**Total Transitional (Policy)** (constant price)	Years	**Average Annual (recurring)** (excl. transitional) (constant price)	**Total Benefit** (Present Value)
Low	**0**		**0**	**0**
High	**0**		**0**	**0**
Best Estimate	**0**		**0**	**0**

Description and scale of key monetised benefits by 'main affected groups' Maximum 5 lines

No quantifiable benefits as no intervention occurs.

Other key non-monetised benefits by 'main affected groups' Maximum 5 lines

Doing nothing maintains the existing legal and operational status quo and does not address the welfare concerns.

Key Assumptions, Sensitivities, Risks Maximum 5 lines

This option assumes that existing legislation and guidance are sufficiently robust to manage welfare risks without further intervention. However, there is a high risk of increased public criticism, declining confidence in animal welfare protections and perception that the Department is failing to respond to emerging evidence of harm. The approach is highly sensitive to external scrutiny, welfare advocacy pressure, and international policy developments.

BUSINESS ASSESSMENT (Option)

Direct Impact on business (Equivalent Annual) £m		

Costs:	Benefits:	Net:		

Cross Border Issues (Option)

How does this option compare to other UK regions and to other EU Member States (particularly Republic of Ireland) Maximum 3 lines Other UK regions, Republic of Ireland and EU Member States are progressing towards bans or restrictions on aversive training devices. Maintaining the status quo would place Northern Ireland out of step with developing welfare standards. This option represents the least alignment with UK, ROI and EU policy

Summary: Analysis and Evidence Policy Option 2

Description: Issue guidance discouraging aversive devices

ECONOMIC ASSESSMENT (Option 2)

Costs (£m)	Total Transitional (Policy) (constant price)	Years	Average Annual (recurring) (excl. transitional) (constant price)	Total Cost (Present Value)
Low	**Optional**		**Optional**	**Optional**
High	**Optional**		**Optional**	**Optional**
Best Estimate				

Description and scale of key monetised costs by 'main affected groups' Maximum 5 lines

No cost monetised

Other key non-monetised costs by 'main affected groups' Maximum 5 lines

This option carries minimal costs, primarily low administrative expenditure required to update, publish and disseminate revised training guidance.

There may be non-monetised costs associated with the continued availability and use of aversive training devices, as guidance alone does not restrict their use. Animal welfare organisations and pet owners may experience ongoing negative welfare outcomes where harmful devices remain in use due to non-compliance with voluntary guidance.

Benefits (£m)	Total Transitional (Policy) (constant price)	Years	Average Annual (recurring) (excl. transitional) (constant price)	Total Benefit (Present Value)
Low	**0**		**0**	**0**
High	**0**		**0**	**0**
Best Estimate	**0**		**0**	**0**

Description and scale of key monetised benefits by 'main affected groups' Maximum 5 lines

N/A

Other key non-monetised benefits by 'main affected groups' Maximum 5 lines

• Increased awareness of welfare risks associated with aversive training devices.
• Promotion of best practice and humane, positive reinforcement training methods.
• Potential, though not guaranteed, behaviour change among some pet owners and trainers who choose to follow the guidance.

Key Assumptions, Sensitivities, Risks Maximum 5 lines

The option assumes that voluntary guidance will meaningfully influence behaviour. However, evidence from comparable policy areas suggests guidance without enforcement is often insufficient to change practices. The lack of enforcement powers means it may be ignored by key user groups, limiting the expected welfare impact. Overall, while low-cost, the option is unlikely to produce substantial or consistent improvements in animal welfare.

BUSINESS ASSESSMENT (Option)

Direct Impact on business (Equivalent Annual) £m				
Costs:	**Benefits:**	**Net:**		

Cross Border Issues (Option)

How does this option compare to other UK regions and to other EU Member States (particularly Republic of Ireland) Maximum 3 lines

Issuing updated guidance would broadly mirror Scotland's advisory approach but fall well below the statutory direction being taken in Wales, England and the Republic of Ireland (ROI). It would not reflect the stronger regulatory moves in ROI or the EU's forthcoming restrictions. Overall, NI would remain misaligned with emerging legislative norms.

Summary: Analysis and Evidence Policy Option 3a

Description: Ban handheld e-collars and containment fence systems

ECONOMIC ASSESSMENT (Option 3a)

Costs (£m)	**Total Transitional (Policy)** (constant price)	Years	**Average Annual (recurring)** (excl. transitional) (constant price)	**Total Cost** (Present Value)
Low	**Optional**		**Optional**	**Optional**
High	**Optional**		**Optional**	**Optional**
Best Estimate				

Description and scale of key monetised costs by 'main affected groups' Maximum 5 lines

No costs monetised

Other key non-monetised costs by 'main affected groups' Maximum 5 lines

Non-monetised costs would include:

- Reduced access to containment systems considered by many owners, especially in large rural properties, to be safe, practical, and humane where physical fencing is costly or impractical.
- Potential increased risk of dogs straying, livestock worrying, or traffic incidents where alternative containment solutions are less effective.
- Loss of a behavioural management tool for some owners and trainers, even when used responsibly.
- Manufacturers and retailers would experience loss of sales due to the removal of these products from the market.
- Pet owners, particularly those relying on electronic containment systems, may face transition costs, including purchasing alternative fencing or training solutions.
- Local councils and enforcement bodies would incur ongoing enforcement costs, including monitoring, responding to reports, and potential legal action where non-compliance occurs.

Benefits (£m)	**Total Transitional (Policy)** (constant price)	Years	**Average Annual (recurring)** (excl. transitional) (constant price)	**Total Benefit** (Present Value)
Low	**Optional**		**Optional**	**Optional**
High	**Optional**		**Optional**	**Optional**
Best Estimate				

Description and scale of key monetised benefits by 'main affected groups' Maximum 5 lines

N/A

Other key non-monetised benefits by 'main affected groups' Maximum 5 lines:

- Complete removal of devices associated with painful stimuli and misuse, thereby improving overall animal welfare.
- Clarity and simplicity in messaging, as the policy bans all electric stimulus devices rather than differentiating between types.
- Alignment with certain European jurisdictions, strengthening the UK's position on welfare standards.
- Reduction in potential misuse or inappropriate application of shock-based training tools.
- Encourages humane, positive reinforcement–based training, supporting better behavioural outcomes

Key Assumptions, Sensitivities, Risks Maximum 5 lines

The option assumes that handheld shock collars and containment systems pose comparable welfare risks, though evidence suggests misuse risk is significantly higher with handheld remote-controlled devices than with automated containment systems. There is a high risk of opposition from rural stakeholders, landowners, and farmers who rely on containment fencing to prevent straying and protect livestock. The proportionality of the ban is highly sensitive to the availability, practicality, and cost of alternative containment methods. This option is not recommended.

BUSINESS ASSESSMENT (Option)

Direct Impact on business (Equivalent Annual) £m				
Costs:	**Benefits:**	**Net:**		

Cross Border Issues (Option)

How does this option compare to other UK regions and to other EU Member States (particularly Republic of Ireland) Maximum 3 lines

This option aligns most closely with Wales, the only UK jurisdiction banning both handheld devices and containment systems. However, it would go further than England, Scotland and the Republic of Ireland (ROI), all of which permit containment fences. Northern Ireland would therefore match the strictest UK model but exceed ROI and EU regulatory expectations.

Summary: Analysis and Evidence Policy Option 3b

Description: Ban handheld e-collars, choke collars and prong collars (preferred option)

ECONOMIC ASSESSMENT (Option 3b)

Costs (£m)	**Total Transitional (Policy)** (constant price)	Years	**Average Annual (recurring)** (excl. transitional) (constant price)	**Total Cost** (Present Value)
Low	**Optional**		**Optional**	**Optional**
High	**Optional**		**Optional**	**Optional**
Best Estimate				

Description and scale of key monetised costs by 'main affected groups' Maximum 5 lines

No costs monetised

Other key non-monetised costs by 'main affected groups' Maximum 5 lines

- Some owners or trainers who currently rely on these devices may need to adapt their training approaches, which could involve time and effort rather than direct financial costs.
- Potential confusion may occur in distinguishing prohibited devices from visually similar but lawful alternatives, creating minor practical challenges for enforcement and compliance.
- Limited resistance may arise from specific user groups who believe these tools are necessary for certain behavioural issues. Owners and trainers may face adjustment costs as they transition to alternative training tools and methods.
- Manufacturers and retailers of the banned devices would experience reduced sales and potential loss of product lines.
- Local councils would incur enforcement-related operational costs, including investigation, monitoring, and responding to reports of non-compliance.

Benefits (£m)	**Total Transitional (Policy)** (constant price)	Years	**Average Annual (recurring)** (excl. transitional) (constant price)	**Total Benefit** (Present Value)
Low	**Optional**		**Optional**	**Optional**
High	**Optional**		**Optional**	**Optional**
Best Estimate				

Description and scale of key monetised benefits by 'main affected groups' Maximum 5 lines

N/A

Other key non-monetised benefits by 'main affected groups' Maximum 5 lines

- Significant improvements in animal welfare, as the devices banned have the strongest evidence base for pain, fear, misuse, and behavioural harm.
- Reduction in avoidable suffering, including pain, anxiety, and injury caused by aversive collar types.
- Encourages humane, positive reinforcement–based training, supporting better behavioural outcomes.
- Helps reinforce public trust in the robustness of animal welfare protections.

Key Assumptions, Sensitivities, Risks Maximum 5 lines

The option assumes a clear distinction can be made between banned collars and permitted alternatives, though visual similarity between devices may pose enforcement challenges. Some opposition is expected from certain stakeholder groups who favour these devices for specific behavioural situations. The effectiveness of the ban will depend on the ability of enforcement bodies to identify and respond to breaches promptly and consistently.

BUSINESS ASSESSMENT (Option)

Direct Impact on business (Equivalent Annual) £m				
Costs:	**Benefits:**	**Net:**		

Cross Border Issues (Option)

How does this option compare to other UK regions and to other EU Member States (particularly Republic of Ireland) Maximum 3 lines

This option closely aligns with the direction of travel in England and mirrors the Republic of Ireland's upcoming ban on remote-controlled shock collars while retaining containment fences. It also reflects the scope of the forthcoming EU-wide prohibition on shock, prong and choke collars. Overall, it provides the strongest policy alignment across neighbouring jurisdictions.

Summary: Analysis and Evidence Policy Option 4

Description: Comprehensive ban on all aversive devices

ECONOMIC ASSESSMENT (Option 4)

Costs (£m)	**Total Transitional (Policy)** (constant price)	Years	**Average Annual (recurring)** (excl. transitional) (constant price)	**Total Cost** (Present Value)
Low	**Optional**		**Optional**	**Optional**
High	**Optional**		**Optional**	**Optional**
Best Estimate				

Description and scale of key monetised costs by 'main affected groups' Maximum 5 lines

No costs monetised

Other key non-monetised costs by 'main affected groups' Maximum 5 lines

- Removal of all aversive devices, including those considered lower-risk (e.g. spray collars, containment fences), may disproportionately affect responsible owners who use such devices safely and effectively.
- Potential increases in dog straying, livestock worrying, or safety risks where containment fences are removed without viable alternatives.
- Manufacturers and retailers would face significant loss of sales across multiple product categories.
- Pet owners, particularly those relying on containment systems, would incur costs to replace widely used tools with physical fencing or other alternatives.

Benefits (£m)	**Total Transitional (Policy)** (constant price)	Years	**Average Annual (recurring)** (excl. transitional) (constant price)	**Total Benefit** (Present Value)
Low	**Optional**		**Optional**	**Optional**
High	**Optional**		**Optional**	**Optional**
Best Estimate				

Description and scale of key monetised benefits by 'main affected groups' Maximum 5 lines

N/A

Other key non-monetised benefits by 'main affected groups' Maximum 5 lines

- Provides maximum welfare protection, eliminating all devices that rely on discomfort, pain, or fear.
- Offers clear, simplified enforcement, as all aversive devices are treated consistently, reducing ambiguity for regulators and the public.
- May strengthen public perception of strong welfare standards and ethical training practices.

Key Assumptions, Sensitivities, Risks Maximum 5 lines

This option assumes that all aversive training devices carry equal risk to animal welfare, though evidence suggests that specific devices carry lower misuse risks and can deliver positive welfare outcomes when used responsibly. There is a high risk of strong stakeholder resistance, particularly from rural communities, trainers, and landowners who value containment systems. The policy is highly sensitive to perceptions of over-regulation and may face challenges in public acceptability and political deliverability.

BUSINESS ASSESSMENT (Option)

Direct Impact on business (Equivalent Annual) £m				
Costs:	**Benefits:**	**Net:**		

Cross Border Issues (Option)

How does this option compare to other UK regions and to other EU Member States (particularly Republic of Ireland) Maximum 3 lines

A full ban, including containment fences and spray collars, would exceed all UK, ROI and EU approaches. It would be stricter than Wales, which does not prohibit spray collars, and significantly stricter than ROI, which continues to allow containment systems. NI would therefore be the most restrictive of all jurisdictions.

Evidence Base

Problem under consideration

Aversive training devices are designed to stop or control unwanted behaviours in animals by applying unpleasant stimuli such as electric shock, physical pressure or sudden sensory triggers. Devices commonly used for this purpose include handheld remote-controlled electronic collars, choke collars and prong collars. The use of these devices is not currently prohibited in Northern Ireland, although animals remain protected by the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, which makes it an offence to cause unnecessary suffering. Scientific evidence indicates that such devices can cause pain, fear, stress and anxiety, and may damage the relationship between animals and their owners. There is also no substantial evidence that aversive training methods are more effective than positive, reward-based techniques. Government intervention is therefore necessary to address the welfare risks associated with these devices and to provide greater clarity on acceptable training practices.

Rationale for intervention

While the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 provides general protections against unnecessary suffering, it does not specifically regulate the use of devices designed to control behaviour through aversive stimuli. Scientific evidence indicates that specific devices, particularly handheld remote-controlled electronic collars, choke collars and prong collars, can cause pain, fear, stress and anxiety and may result in both physical and psychological harm. Risks associated with these devices include injury to the neck or trachea, increased aggression or anxiety and behavioural deterioration. These devices are also open to misuse or incorrect application, and enforcement of appropriate use can be difficult in practice. Veterinary and animal welfare organisations have called for stronger regulation. In addition, several jurisdictions are moving towards restricting or prohibiting such devices. Government intervention is therefore considered necessary to address the welfare risks associated with these devices and ensure clearer protections for companion animals.

The Department's Code of Practice for the Welfare of Dogs and its Cat version, already recommends positive reward-based training and discourages the use of painful or frightening methods, but this guidance is non-binding. Legislative intervention provides greater certainty for pet owners, trainers and enforcement authorities, while ensuring consistent welfare protections.

Policy objective

The primary objective is to improve the welfare of cats and dogs in Northern Ireland by addressing the risks associated with aversive training devices. This will be achieved by prohibiting the use of aversive training devices that present the highest risk of harm and misuse.

The policy seeks to:

- Reduce pain, fear, stress and injury associated with aversive devices
- Promote humane, evidence-based training methods
- Strengthen owner accountability
- Maintain a proportionate regulatory approach

Description of options considered

Option 1 – Do Nothing

This option would retain the current position, relying solely on the general protections under the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 and existing non-statutory guidance. This would avoid new legislative burdens but would allow continued use and misuse of aversive devices known to harm animal welfare. It would not address stakeholder concerns or align with emerging standards.

Option 2 – Guidance Only

This option would involve issuing updated guidance discouraging the use of aversive training devices and promoting positive reinforcement methods. While low cost and non-legislative, guidance would be non-binding

and could be ignored. It would not provide enforceable protections or sufficient deterrence against harmful practices.

Option 3A – Ban handheld electronic collars and electronic containment fence systems

This option would prohibit all devices delivering electric stimuli, including remote-controlled collars and perimeter fence systems. This would simplify messaging and align with some European approaches but would remove containment systems that many owners, particularly in rural areas, view as a practical and humane solution where physical fencing is not feasible. This option was assessed as likely to generate strong opposition and was assessed as disproportionate.

Option 3B – Ban handheld electronic collars, choke collars and prong collars (Preferred Option)

This option targets the devices with the strongest evidence of welfare harm and misuse while retaining containment fence systems and spray collars, which present lower risks.

This approach:
• Focuses on greatest welfare impact
• Maintains proportionate flexibility
• Balances welfare protection with practical considerations

Option 4 – Comprehensive ban on all aversive devices

This option would prohibit all devices relying on aversive stimuli, including spray collars and containment systems.
While maximising welfare protection, it would remove tools that some owners and trainers regard as low risk when used appropriately and was assessed as disproportionate at this stage.

Monetised and non-monetised costs and benefits

Option 1 – Do Nothing

This option carries no additional financial or administrative costs. However, it results in continued welfare harm to animals, does not address misuse of aversive devices and risks reputational damage to the department. It also leads to increasing divergence from emerging UK, Republic of Ireland and EU welfare standards.

Option 2 – Guidance only

The option would involve minimal administrative costs associated with updating and distributing guidance. While it may increase awareness and encourage some voluntary behaviour change, it does not provide enforceable protections and is unlikely to deliver consistent or meaningful welfare improvements. Welfare issues would therefore be likely to persist.

Option 3A - Ban handheld e-collars and containment fence systems

This option would deliver significant welfare benefits through the removal of all electric stimulus devices. However, it introduces notable non-monetised costs, particularly for rural stakeholders who rely on containment systems as a practical alternative to physical fencing. There is a risk of unintended consequences, including increased dog straying and livestock worrying. This option is considered disproportionate given the lower misuse risk associated with containment systems.

Option 3B – Ban handheld e-collars, choke collars and prong collars

This option would deliver significant welfare benefits by targeting devices with the strongest evidence of harm and misuse. Non-monetised costs are expected to be limited and primarily relate to behavioural adjustments by owners and trainers, potential impacts on retailers and some enforcement activity. The option maintains flexibility by allowing lower-risk devices such as containment systems to remain in use, therefor reducing impacts on rural stakeholders.

Option 4 – Comprehensive ban on all aversive devices

This option provides the highest level of welfare protection. However, it introduces significant non-monetised costs, including impacts on responsible owners using lower-risk devices, increased costs for alternative containment measures and likely strong stakeholder opposition. It is considered overly restrictive and disproportionate at this stage.

Preferred Option - 3B

Based on the comparative assessment of costs and benefits set out above, Option 3B is identified as the preferred option.
This option provides the most proportionate balance between improving animal welfare and minimising adverse impacts on owners, businesses and rural stakeholders. It targets the devices with the strongest evidence of harm and misuse, while avoiding the unintended consequences associated with banning lower-risk devices such as containment systems.

Option 3B also aligns closely with the direction of travel in other UK jurisdictions and the Republic of Ireland, supporting policy coherence while maintaining flexibility for responsible pet ownership. Overall, this option is considered to provide the best balance improving animal welfare and being practical to implement.

Proportionality and level of analysis

Given the limited availability of quantitative cost data and the policy's primary focus on welfare outcomes, a qualitative proportionality approach has been adopted for this stage. Public consultation will seek further evidence on costs, benefits and practical impacts to inform any future full regulatory impact assessment.

Risks and assumptions

Key risks include:

• Resistance from some rural stakeholders, trainers and manufacturers
• Enforcement challenges where devices appear similar
• User non-compliance during transition

Key assumptions include:

• Legislative clarity will improve compliance
• Most owners will transition to humane training methods
• Welfare benefits will outweigh implementation costs

Direct costs and benefits to business

Businesses involved in the manufacture, sale and use of prohibited devices may experience reduced sales or service demand. Likewise, Dog Trainers who use currently use these devices during their training may also experience loss of business. Conversely, positive training providers may experience increased demand. Further evidence will be sought through consultation.

Wider impacts

The policy is expected to:
• Strengthen Northern Ireland's animal welfare framework
• Support long-term improvements in responsible pet ownership
• Enhance public trust in welfare standards

Overall impact

The proposed policy is expected to deliver a positive overall impact by improving the welfare of cats and dogs through the prohibition of the aversive training devices most strongly associated with pain, stress and misuse. While there will be some transition costs for owners, trainers and businesses that currently rely on these devices, these impacts are expected to be limited and proportionate, with opportunities for growth in

positive-reinforcement training services. Enforcement costs are anticipated to be modest and largely integrated within existing animal welfare frameworks. The approach strengthens clarity for owners and enforcement bodies and supports responsible pet ownership. Overall, the welfare gains and improved public confidence are expected to outweigh the associated costs.

Appendix 1 - Rural Needs Impact Assessment (RNIA) Template

SECTION 1 - Defining the activity subject to Section 1(1) of the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016

1A. Name of Public Authority.

Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (The Department)

1B. Please provide a short title which describes the activity being undertaken by the Public Authority that is subject to Section 1(1) of the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016.

Developing regulations under the Welfare of Animals Act (NI) 2011 to introduce a ban on specific aversive training devices for companion animals in Northern Ireland.

1C. Please indicate which category the activity specified in Section 1B above relates to.

Developing a	Policy	X	Strategy		Plan	
Adopting a	Policy		Strategy		Plan	
Implementing a	Policy		Strategy		Plan	
Revising a	Policy		Strategy		Plan	
Designing a Public Service						
Delivering a Public Service						

1D. Please provide the official title (if any) of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service document or initiative relating to the category indicated in Section 1C above.

Development of regulations to prohibit the use of specific aversive training devices for companion animals in Northern Ireland.

1E. Please provide details of the aims and/or objectives of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service.

The aim of this policy is to introduce a ban on the use of specific aversive training devices, namely handheld e-collars, choke chains and prong collars in Northern Ireland. This policy will help improve animal welfare in Northern Ireland.

1F. What definition of 'rural' is the Public Authority using in respect of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service?

Population Settlements of less than 5,000 (Default definition).	X
Other Definition (Provide details and the rationale below).	
A definition of 'rural' is not applicable.	

Details of alternative definition of 'rural' used.

N/A

Rationale for using alternative definition of 'rural'.

N/A

Reasons why a definition of 'rural' is not applicable.

N/A

SECTION 2 - Understanding the impact of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service

2A. Is the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service likely to impact on people in rural areas?

Yes [X] No [ ] If the response is **NO** GO TO Section **2E**.

2B. Please explain how the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is likely to impact on people in rural areas.

The proposed policy is to prohibit the use of specific aversive dog training devices, specifically remote-controlled e-collars, choke collars, and prong collars, is expected to have a range of implications for individuals residing in rural areas.

Training practices – Rural dog owners, particularly those managing working breeds for herding, or pest control, may currently rely on aversive devices for behavioural control. The policy will require a shift toward positive reinforcement-based training methods.

2C. If the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is likely to impact on people in rural areas *differently* from people in urban areas, please explain how it is likely to impact on people in rural areas differently.

This policy will promote animal welfare across all Northern Ireland, both in urban and rural areas. However, the proposed ban may affect rural communities slightly differently from urban populations due to the distinct roles dogs play and the environments in which they are kept and trained.

In rural areas, dogs can be used for working purposes, such as herding livestock, whereas in urban settings, dogs are primarily kept as companion animals. As a result, it is possible that dog owners may have relied more heavily on aversive training tools to manage working behaviours in demanding environments.

2D. Please indicate which of the following rural policy areas the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is likely to primarily impact on.

Rural Businesses	X
Rural Tourism	
Rural Housing	
Jobs or Employment in Rural Areas	X
Education or Training in Rural Areas	X
Broadband or Mobile Communications in Rural Areas	
Transport Services or Infrastructure in Rural Areas	
Health or Social Care Services in Rural Areas	
Poverty in Rural Areas	
Deprivation in Rural Areas	
Rural Crime or Community Safety	
Rural Development	
Agri-Environment	
Other (Please state)	

If the response to Section 2A was YES GO TO Section 3A.

2E. Please explain why the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is NOT likely to impact on people in rural areas.

N/A

SECTION 3 - Identifying the Social and Economic Needs of Persons in Rural Areas

3A. Has the Public Authority taken steps to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas that are relevant to the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service?

Yes [X] No [ ] If the response is **NO** GO TO Section **3E**.

3B. Please indicate which of the following methods or information sources were used by the Public Authority to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas.

Consultation with Rural Stakeholders	[ ]	Published Statistics	[ ]
Consultation with Other Organisations	[ ]	Research Papers	[X]
Surveys or Questionnaires	[ ]	Other Publications	[X]
Other Methods or Information Sources (include details in Question 3C below).			[ ]

3C. Please provide details of the methods and information sources used to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas including relevant dates, names of organisations, titles of publications, website references, details of surveys or consultations undertaken etc.

DAERA Officials have engaged with the Kennel Club to discuss the pros and cons of a potential ban, taking the needs of people in rural areas into consideration.

Development of this policy required significant desk research including research papers and analysis of policy and guidance in other jurisdictions:

- The use of shock collars and their impact on the welfare of dogs: A review of the current literature - *Emily Blackwell and Rachel Casey Department of Clinical Veterinary Science University of Bristol,* 2006
- Report on the use of handheld remote-controlled training devices (e-collars) in dog training - *Scottish Animal Welfare Commission,* April 2023
- BVA and BSAVA policy position on the use of aversive training devices in dogs and cats
- Proposal on the welfare of dogs and cats and their traceability – *EU Parliament*
- Welfare of dogs and cats and their traceability – *Legislative Observatory, EU Parliament*
- A review of recent evidence in relation to the welfare implications for cats and dogs arising from the use of electronic collars – *Author: Ruth Lysons, Reviewed by: Nick Coulson*, 2015

3D. Please provide details of the social and economic needs of people in rural areas which have been identified by the Public Authority?

This policy will promote animal welfare across all Northern Ireland, both in urban and rural areas.

However, rural dog owners may have less access to resources and support, such as training facilities, qualified trainers and educational materials, than people in Urban populations. Rural communities may require additional support, training resources, and engagement to ensure a smooth and effective transition that maintains both welfare standards and working dog functionality.

The Department will seek further evidence on these needs through a public consultation, which is expected to take place in summer 2026.

If the response to Section 3A was YES GO TO Section 4A.

3E. Please explain why no steps were taken by the Public Authority to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas?

N/A

SECTION 4 - Considering the Social and Economic Needs of Persons in Rural Areas

4A. Please provide details of the issues considered in relation to the social and economic needs of people in rural areas.

This policy will promote animal welfare across all Northern Ireland, both in urban and rural areas.

However, rural dog owners may have less access to resources and support, such as training facilities, qualified trainers and educational materials, than people in Urban populations. Rural communities may require additional support, training resources, and engagement to ensure a smooth and effective transition that maintains both welfare standards and working dog functionality.

A communication approach will be developed alongside the policy to ensure that information on the proposed changes, including guidance on alternative training methods, is accessible to both rural and urban dog owners. This will include stakeholder engagement and the use of online and offline channels where appropriate.

The forthcoming public consultation will also provide an opportunity to gather views from rural stakeholders and ensure that their specific needs and circumstances are fully considered in the final policy design.

SECTION 5 - Influencing the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service

5A. Has the development, adoption, implementation or revising of the Policy, Strategy or Plan, or the design or delivery of the Public Service, been influenced by the rural needs identified?

Yes [X] **No** [ ] **If the response is NO GO TO Section 5C.**

5B. Please explain how the development, adoption, implementation or revising of the Policy, Strategy or Plan, or the design or delivery of the Public Service, has been influenced by the rural needs identified.

The development of this policy has taken account of the needs of people in rural areas, particularly in relation to the use of working dogs and access to training support.

In order to mitigate potential impacts, the policy has been designed to take a proportionate approach by targeting only those devices with the strongest evidence of welfare harm, while not extending to other devices which may be considered more practical in certain rural contexts, such as containment fences.

The Department also recognises the need to support all dog owners, including those in rural areas, in transitioning of alternative training methods. This will be supported through the provision of clear guidance and stakeholder engagement.

The public consultation will actively seek views from the rural stakeholders to identify any further mitigation measures that may be required.

If the response to Section 5A was YES GO TO Section 6A.

5C. Please explain why the development, adoption, implementation or revising of the Policy, Strategy or Plan, or the design or the delivery of the Public Service, has NOT been influenced by the rural needs identified.

No rural needs have been identified. The Department will take account of any needs that might be identified during public consultation.

SECTION 6 – Documenting and Recording

6A. Please tick below to confirm that the RNIA Template will be retained by the Public Authority and relevant information on the Section 1 activity compiled in accordance with paragraph 6.7 of the guidance.

I confirm that the RNIA Template will be retained and relevant information compiled. X

Rural Needs Impact Assessment undertaken by:	Colin Stewart
Position/Grade:	Staff Officer
Division/Branch	Animal Identification & Welfare Branch
Signature:	Colin Stewart
Date:	13/03/26
Rural Needs Impact Assessment approved by:	Catherine Goligher
Position/Grade:	Grade 7
Division/Branch:	Animal Welfare and Dog Control Policy Branch
Signature:	Catherine Goligher
Date:	14 April 2026

Equality & Disability Duties Screening Template

December 2023 version

Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs
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An Roinn Talmhaíochta, Comhshaoil agus Gnóthaí Tuaithe

Depairtment o' Fairmin, Environment an' Kintra Matthers

Screening flowchart and template (taken from Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 - A Guide for public authorities April 2010 (Appendix 1)).

Introduction

Part 1. Policy scoping – asks public authorities to provide details about the policy, procedure, practice and/or decision being screened and what available evidence you have gathered to help make an assessment of the likely impact on equality of opportunity and good relations.

Part 2. Screening questions – asks about the extent of the likely impact of the policy on groups of people within each of the Section 75 categories. Details of the groups consulted and the level of assessment of the likely impact. This includes consideration of multiple identity and good relations issues. This section also includes two questions related to the Disability Duties.

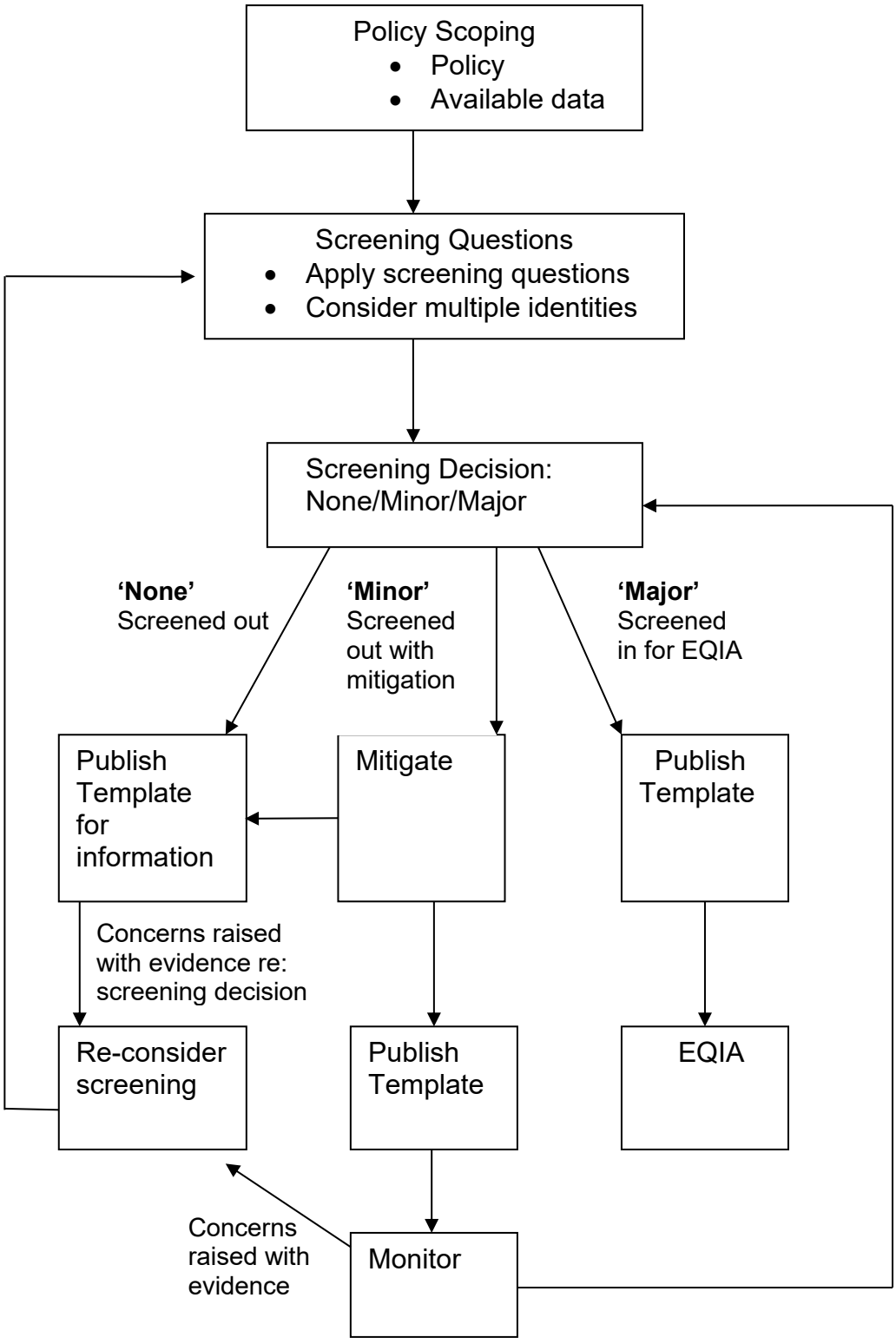
Part 3. Screening decision – guides the public authority to reach a screening decision as to whether or not there is a need to carry out an equality impact assessment (EQIA), or to introduce measures to mitigate the likely impact, or the introduction of an alternative policy to better promote equality of opportunity and/or good relations.

Part 4. Monitoring – provides guidance to public authorities on monitoring for adverse impact and broader monitoring.

Part 5. Consideration of Human Rights – please note this is not a Human Rights Screening form but rather a prompt that impacts on Human Rights should be considered.

Part 6. Approval and authorisation – verifies the public authority's approval of a screening decision by a senior manager responsible for the policy.

A screening flowchart is provided below.



Part 1. Policy scoping

The first stage of the screening process involves scoping the policy under consideration. The purpose of policy scoping is to help prepare the background and context and set out the aims and objectives for the policy, being screened. At this stage, scoping the policy will help identify potential constraints as well as opportunities and will help the policy maker work through the screening process on a step by step basis.

Public authorities should remember that the Section 75 statutory duties apply to internal policies (relating to people who work for the authority), as well as external policies (relating to those who are, or could be, served by the authority).

Information about the policy

Name of the policy

A proposal to introduce a ban on specific aversive training devices

Is this an existing, revised or new policy?

New policy

What is it trying to achieve? (intended aims/outcomes)

Aversive training devices are designed to use discomfort, pain or fear to train pets, on the principle of applying an unpleasant stimulus to stop or prevent unwanted behaviour. These devices have the potential to cause both physical and psychological suffering. In Northern Ireland, the use and sale of e-collars is currently legal but subject to the general provisions of The Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, which places a duty on people to ensure they take reasonable steps to meet the welfare needs of animals for which they are responsible. This includes

protecting animals from unnecessary suffering, pain and injury. Therefore, if an e-collar is used in a manner that causes pain, fear or distress to an animal, the user could be liable for prosecution under the 2011 Act.

The overall aim of this policy is to introduce a ban on the use of specific aversive training devices, namely handheld e-collars, choke chains and prong collars in Northern Ireland. This policy will help improve animal welfare in Northern Ireland.

Are there any Section 75 categories which might be expected to benefit from the intended policy? ☐ Yes ☒ No (select as appropriate)

If so, explain how.

Who initiated or wrote the policy?

The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs.

Who owns and who implements the policy?

The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs.

Implementation factors

Are there any factors which could contribute to/detract from the intended aim/outcome of the policy/decision? ☒ Yes ☐ No (select as appropriate)

If yes, are they (please select as appropriate)

Financial ☐

Legislative ☒

other, please specify:

The policy will be laid through the powers in the Animal Welfare (Northern Ireland) Act 2011. The policy is included in Minister Muirs Animal Welfare Pathway 2025-27.

Main stakeholders affected

Who are the internal and external stakeholders (actual or potential) that the policy will impact upon? (please select as appropriate)

Staff ☐

Service users ☐

Other public sector organisations ☒

Voluntary/community/trade unions ☒

Other, please specify

Other policies with a bearing on this policy

What are they?

N/A

Who owns them?

N/A

Available evidence

Evidence to help inform the screening process may take many forms. Public authorities should ensure that their screening decision is informed by relevant data. The Commission has produced this guide to signpost to S75 data.

What evidence/information (both qualitative and quantitative) have you gathered to inform this policy? Specify details for each of the Section 75 categories.

Please ensure all data used is the most current and up to date available. You should verify this by contacting the Departmental Statisticians.

Religious belief evidence/information:

There is no evidence to suggest that the revised policy will impact negatively on people in this category.
Northern Ireland's 2021 Census shows Catholics as the largest religious group (42.31%), followed by Presbyterians (16.61%), Church of Ireland (11.55%) and Methodists (2.35%), with others identifying as other Christians (6.85%), other religions (1.34%), no religion (17.39%), or not stating a religion (1.60%).
The PDSA PAW Report 2022 surveyed 5,768 pet owners. They used the information to estimate a total of 10.2 million dogs and 11.1 million cats in the UK. The majority of owners (86%) confirmed they had made use of a training device on their dog, with 20% of dog owners admitted to using an aversive training device. No religious belief was surveyed in the gathering of statistics.
The Dogs Trust's National Dog Survey 2025 received 6,512 responses, including 2% from Northern Ireland. Respondents were predominantly aged 45–74, female, White British, homeowners, and living in two-adult households; 19% included children. No data on religious belief was collected.

The upcoming public consultation will allow both individuals and organisations to share their perspectives. Any matters pertaining to religious beliefs that arise during the consultation will be thoroughly evaluated when determining the final policy proposal.

Political Opinion evidence/information:

There is no evidence to suggest that the revised policy will impact negatively on people in this category.
The 2024 NI Life & Times survey shows the political outlook in Northern Ireland, with 30% identifying as unionist, 30% as nationalist, and the largest share (35%) identifying as neither, while small minorities selected another answer (2%) or said they did not know (3%).
The PDSA PAW Report 2022 surveyed 5,768 pet owners. They used the information to estimate a total of 10.2 million dogs and 11.1 million cats in the UK. The majority of owners (86%) confirmed they had made use of a training device on their dog, with 20% of dog owners admitted to using an aversive training device. No political opinion was surveyed in the gathering of statistics.
The Dogs Trust's National Dog Survey 2025 received 6,512 responses, including 2% from Northern Ireland. Respondents were predominantly aged 45–74, female, White British, homeowners, and living in two-adult households; 19% included children. No data on political opinion was collected.
The upcoming public consultation will allow both individuals and organisations to share their perspectives. Any matters pertaining to political opinion that arise during the consultation will be thoroughly evaluated when determining the final policy proposal.

Racial Group evidence/information:

There is no evidence to suggest that the revised policy will impact negatively on people in this category.

Northern Ireland's 2021 Census shows a population of approximately 97% identifying as White, while minority ethnic groups together account for about 3% of the population; the largest of these are Indian and Chinese communities (around 0.5% each), Mixed ethnicities (0.8%), and Black ethnic groups (around 0.6%).

The PDSA PAW Report 2022 surveyed 5,768 pet owners. They used the information to estimate a total of 10.2 million dogs and 11.1 million cats in the UK. The majority of owners (86%) confirmed they had made use of a training device on their dog, with 20% of dog owners admitted to using an aversive training device. No racial information was surveyed in the gathering of statistics.

The Dogs Trust's National Dog Survey 2025 received 6,512 responses, including 2% from Northern Ireland. Respondents predominantly identified as White British.

The upcoming public consultation will allow both individuals and organisations to share their perspectives. Any matters pertaining racial group that arise during the consultation will be thoroughly evaluated when determining the final policy proposal.

Age evidence/information:

There is no evidence to suggest that the revised policy will impact negatively on people in this category.

Based on Northern Ireland's Census 2021, the population age profile can be summarised as follows: 25.14% of the population are aged 0–19 years, 25.28% are 20–39 years, 26.48% are 40–59 years, 18.73% are 60–79 years,

and 4.37% are aged 80 years and over, illustrating a broadly even distribution across the working-age groups with a smaller proportion in the oldest age category.

The PDSA PAW Report 2022 surveyed 5,768 pet owners. They used the information to estimate a total of 10.2 million dogs and 11.1 million cats in the UK. The majority of owners (86%) confirmed they had made use of a training device on their dog, with 20% of dog owners admitted to using an aversive training device. No age group data was surveyed in the gathering of statistics.

The Dogs Trust's National Dog Survey 2025 received 6,512 responses, including 2% from Northern Ireland. Respondents were predominantly aged 45–74 (64% of respondents).

The upcoming public consultation will allow both individuals and organisations to share their perspectives. Any matters pertaining to age that arise during the consultation will be thoroughly evaluated when determining the final policy proposal.

Marital Status evidence/information:

There is no evidence to suggest that the revised policy will impact negatively on people in this category.

Northern Ireland's Census 2021 shows that 45.59% of the population are married, while 38.07% are single (never married or never in a civil partnership); smaller proportions are divorced (6.02%), widowed or surviving a civil partner (6.36%), separated (3.78%), and in a civil partnership (0.18%).

The PDSA PAW Report 2022 surveyed 5,768 pet owners. They used the information to estimate a total of 10.2 million dogs and 11.1 million cats in the UK. The majority of owners (86%) confirmed they had made use of a training device on their dog, with 20% of dog owners admitted to using an aversive

training device. No marital status data was surveyed in the gathering of statistics.

The Dogs Trust's National Dog Survey 2025[1] indicates that 6,512 people from Northern Ireland responded to its survey about dogs. The survey did not include information about marital status.

The upcoming public consultation will allow both individuals and organisations to share their perspectives. Any matters pertaining to marital status that arise during the consultation will be thoroughly evaluated when determining the final policy proposal.

Sexual Orientation evidence/information:

There is no evidence to suggest that the revised policy will impact negatively on people in this category.

Northern Ireland's Census 2021 shows that the vast majority of the population identify as straight or heterosexual (90.04%), while 2.09% identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or another sexual orientation, and 7.87% either preferred not to say or did not state their sexual orientation.

The PDSA PAW Report 2022 surveyed 5,768 pet owners. They used the information to estimate a total of 10.2 million dogs and 11.1 million cats in the UK. The majority of owners (86%) confirmed they had made use of a training device on their dog, with 20% of dog owners admitted to using an aversive training device. No sexual orientation data was surveyed in the gathering of statistics.

The Dogs Trust's National Dog Survey 2025[2] indicates that 6,512 people from Northern Ireland responded to its survey about dogs. The survey did not include information about sexual orientation.

[1] NDS 2025 State of the nation report desktop version.pdf
[2] NDS 2025 State of the nation report desktop version.pdf

The upcoming public consultation will allow both individuals and organisations to share their perspectives. Any matters pertaining to sexual orientation that arise during the consultation will be thoroughly evaluated when determining the final policy proposal.

Men & Women generally evidence/information:

There is no evidence to suggest that the revised policy will impact negatively on people in this category.
Northern Ireland's Census 2021 shows that the population is almost evenly split by sex, with females accounting for 50.81% of the population and males 49.19%.
The PDSA PAW Report 2022 surveyed 5,768 pet owners. They used the information to estimate a total of 10.2 million dogs and 11.1 million cats in the UK. The majority of owners (86%) confirmed they had made use of a training device on their dog, with 20% of dog owners admitted to using an aversive training device. No gender data was surveyed in the gathering of statistics.
The Dogs Trust's National Dog Survey 2025[3] indicates that 6,512 people from Northern Ireland responded to its survey about dogs. The survey indicates: responses were received from participants across all four nations of the UK, 2% of whom were from Northern Ireland, broadly reflecting the UK population distribution, and the majority identified as female (80%).
The upcoming public consultation will allow both individuals and organisations to share their perspectives. Any matters pertaining to gender that arise during the consultation will be thoroughly evaluated when determining the final policy proposal.

Disability evidence/information:

[3] NDS 2025 State of the nation report desktop version.pdf

There is no evidence to suggest that the revised policy will impact negatively on people in this category.

Northern Ireland's Census 2021 shows that 55.14% of households have no residents with a limiting long-term health problem or disability, while 33.63% have one resident with a limiting condition and 11.23% have two or more residents.

The PDSA PAW Report 2022 surveyed 5,768 pet owners. They used the information to estimate a total of 10.2 million dogs and 11.1 million cats in the UK. The majority of owners (86%) confirmed they had made use of a training device on their dog, with 20% of dog owners admitted to using an aversive training device. No disability data was surveyed in the gathering of statistics.

The Dogs Trust's National Dog Survey 2025[4] indicates that 6,512 people from Northern Ireland responded to its survey about dogs. The survey did not include information about sexual orientation.

The upcoming public consultation will allow both individuals and organisations to share their perspectives. Any matters pertaining to disability that arise during the consultation will be thoroughly evaluated and potential mitigations considered and included in final policy as necessary when determining the final policy proposal.

Dependants evidence/information:

There is no evidence to suggest that the revised policy will impact negatively on people in this category.

Northern Ireland's Census 2021 shows that just over half of households (53.15%) have no children, with a further 16.17% having no dependent children, meaning around seven in ten households do not include dependent

[4] NDS 2025 State of the nation report desktop version.pdf

children, while around 30% do; among those with dependent children, households most commonly have one or two children, and larger families are relatively rare, with around 6–7% of households having three or more dependent children.

The PDSA PAW Report 2022 surveyed 5,768 pet owners. They used the information to estimate a total of 10.2 million dogs and 11.1 million cats in the UK. The majority of owners (86%) confirmed they had made use of a training device on their dog, with 20% of dog owners admitted to using an aversive training device. No dependants data was surveyed in the gathering of statistics.

The Dogs Trust's National Dog Survey 2025[5] indicates that 6,512 people from Northern Ireland responded to its survey about dogs. The survey indicates: responses were received from participants across all four nations of the UK, 2% of whom were from Northern Ireland, broadly reflecting the UK population distribution; most households consisted of two adults, and 19% included children.

The upcoming public consultation will allow both individuals and organisations to share their perspectives. Any matters pertaining to dependants that arise during the consultation will be thoroughly evaluated when determining the final policy proposal.

Needs, experiences and priorities

Taking into account the information referred to above, what are the different needs, experiences and priorities of each of the following categories, in relation to the particular policy/decision?

[5] NDS 2025 State of the nation report desktop version.pdf

Specify details of the needs, experiences and priorities for each of the Section 75 categories below:

Religious belief

None - There is no evidence that's shows a link between religious belief and use of aversive training devices

Political Opinion

None - There is no evidence that's shows a link between political opinion and use of aversive training devices

Racial Group

None - There is no evidence that's shows a link between race and use of aversive training devices

Age

None - There is no evidence that's shows a link between age and use of aversive training devices

Marital status

None - There is no evidence that's shows a link between marital status and use of aversive training devices

Sexual orientation

None - There is no evidence that's shows a link between sexual orientation and use of aversive training devices

Men and Women Generally

None - There is no evidence that's shows a link between gender and use of aversive training devices

Disability

None - There is no evidence that's shows a link between disability and use of aversive training devices

Dependants

None - There is no evidence that's shows a link between having dependants and use of aversive training devices

Introduction

In making a decision as to whether or not there is a need to carry out an equality impact assessment, the public authority should consider its answers to the questions 1-4.

If the public authority's conclusion is **none** in respect of all of the Section 75 equality of opportunity and/or good relations categories, then the public authority may decide to screen the policy out. If a policy is 'screened out' as having no relevance to equality of opportunity or good relations, a public authority should give details of the reasons for the decision taken.

If the public authority's conclusion is **major** in respect of one or more of the Section 75 equality of opportunity and/or good relations categories, then consideration should be given to subjecting the policy to the equality impact assessment procedure.

If the public authority's conclusion is **minor** in respect of one or more of the Section 75 equality categories and/or good relations categories, then consideration should still be given to proceeding with an equality impact assessment, or to:

- measures to mitigate the adverse impact; or
- the introduction of an alternative policy to better promote equality of opportunity and/or good relations.

In favour of a 'major' impact

a) The policy is significant in terms of its strategic importance;
b) Potential equality impacts are unknown, because, for example, there is insufficient data upon which to make an assessment or because they are complex, and it would be appropriate to conduct an equality impact assessment in order to better assess them;
c) Potential equality and/or good relations impacts are likely to be adverse or are likely to be experienced disproportionately by groups of people including those who are marginalised or disadvantaged;
d) Further assessment offers a valuable way to examine the evidence and develop recommendations in respect of a policy about which there are concerns amongst affected individuals and representative groups, for example in respect of multiple identities;
e) The policy is likely to be challenged by way of judicial review;
f) The policy is significant in terms of expenditure.

In favour of 'minor' impact

a) The policy is not unlawfully discriminatory and any residual potential impacts on people are judged to be negligible;
b) The policy, or certain proposals within it, are potentially unlawfully discriminatory, but this possibility can readily and easily be eliminated by making appropriate changes to the policy or by adopting appropriate mitigating measures;
c) Any asymmetrical equality impacts caused by the policy are intentional because they are specifically designed to promote equality of opportunity for particular groups of disadvantaged people;
d) By amending the policy there are better opportunities to better promote equality of opportunity and/or good relations.

In favour of none

1) The policy has no relevance to equality of opportunity or good relations.
2) The policy is purely technical in nature and will have no bearing in terms of its likely impact on equality of opportunity or good relations for people within the equality and good relations categories.

Taking into account the evidence presented above, consider and comment on the likely impact on equality of opportunity and good relations for those affected by this policy, in any way, for each of the equality and good relations categories, by applying the screening questions given overleaf and indicate the level of impact on the group i.e. minor, major or none.

Screening questions

1. **What is the likely impact on equality of opportunity for those affected by this policy, for each of the Section 75 equality categories?** Please provide details of the likely policy impacts and determine the level of impact for each S75 categories below i.e. either minor, major or none.

Details of the likely policy impacts on *Religious belief*:

None – All dog owners regardless of religion will be impacted equally with a ban on specific aversive training devices as no evidence suggests any group uses these devices more than any other.

What is the level of impact? Minor ☐ Major ☐ None ☒
(select as appropriate)

Details of the likely policy impacts on *Political Opinion:*

None – All dog owners regardless of political opinion will be impacted equally with a ban on specific aversive training devices as no evidence suggests any group uses these devices more than any other.

What is the level of impact? Minor ☐ Major ☐ None ☒
(select as appropriate)

Details of the likely policy impacts on *Racial Group*:

None – All dog owners regardless of race will be impacted equally with a ban on specific aversive training devices as no evidence suggests any group uses these devices more than any other.

What is the level of impact? Minor ☐ Major ☐ None ☒
(select as appropriate)

Details of the likely policy impacts on *Age*:

None – All dog owners regardless of age will be impacted equally with a ban on specific aversive training devices as no evidence suggests any group uses these devices more than any other.

What is the level of impact? Minor ☐ Major ☐ None ☒
(select as appropriate)

Details of the likely policy impacts on *Marital Status*:

None – All dog owners regardless of marital status will be impacted equally with a ban on specific aversive training devices as no evidence suggests any group uses these devices more than any other.

What is the level of impact? Minor ☐ Major ☐ None ☒
(select as appropriate)

Details of the likely policy impacts on *Sexual Orientation*:

None – All dog owners regardless of sexual orientation will be impacted equally with a ban on specific aversive training devices as no evidence suggests any group uses these devices more than any other.

What is the level of impact Minor ☐ Major ☐ None ☒
(select as appropriate)

Details of the likely policy impacts on *Men and Women*:

None – All dog owners regardless of gender will be impacted equally with a ban on specific aversive training devices as no evidence suggests any group uses these devices more than any other.

What is the level of impact? Minor ☐ Major ☐ None ☒
(select as appropriate)

Details of the likely policy impacts on *Disability*:

None – All dog owners regardless of disability status will be impacted equally with a ban on specific aversive training devices as no evidence suggests any group uses these devices more than any other.

What is the level of impact? Minor ☐ Major ☐ None ☒
(select as appropriate)

Details of the likely policy impacts on *Dependants*:

None – All dog owners regardless of having dependants or not will be impacted equally with a ban on specific aversive training devices as no evidence suggests any group uses these devices more than any other.

What is the level of impact? ☐ Major ☐ None ☒
(select as appropriate)

2. **Are there opportunities to better promote equality of opportunity for people within the Section 75 equalities categories?**

☐ Yes ☒ No (select as appropriate)

Detail opportunities of how this policy could promote equality of

opportunity for people within each of the Section 75 Categories below:

Religious Belief **- If Yes, provide details:**

N/A

If No, provide reasons:

There is no impact envisaged on, or opportunity to promote equality of opportunity for people within this category. However, the proposed reforms will be subject to a public consultation, and the responses to the consultation will be monitored to inform the position.

Political Opinion **- If Yes, provide details:**

N/A

If No, provide reasons:

There is no impact envisaged on, or opportunity to promote equality of opportunity for people within this category. However, the proposed reforms will be subject to a public consultation, and the responses to the consultation will be monitored to inform the position.

Racial Group **- If Yes, provide details:**

N/A

If No, provide reasons:

There is no impact envisaged on, or opportunity to promote equality of opportunity for people within this category. However, the proposed

reforms will be subject to a public consultation, and the responses to the consultation will be monitored to inform the position.

Age **- If Yes, provide details:**

N/A

If No, provide reasons:

There is no impact envisaged on, or opportunity to promote equality of opportunity for people within this category. However, the proposed reforms will be subject to a public consultation, and the responses to the consultation will be monitored to inform the position.

Marital Status **- If Yes, provide details:**

N/A

If No, provide reasons

There is no impact envisaged on, or opportunity to promote equality of opportunity for people within this category. However, the proposed reforms will be subject to a public consultation, and the responses to the consultation will be monitored to inform the position.

Sexual Orientation **- If Yes, provide details:**

N/A

If No, provide reasons:

There is no impact envisaged on, or opportunity to promote equality of opportunity for people within this category. However, the proposed

reforms will be subject to a public consultation, and the responses to the consultation will be monitored to inform the position.

Men and Women generally **- If Yes, provide details:**

N/A

If No, provide reasons:

There is no impact envisaged on, or opportunity to promote equality of opportunity for people within this category. However, the proposed reforms will be subject to a public consultation, and the responses to the consultation will be monitored to inform the position.

Disability **- If Yes, provide details:**

N/A

If No, provide reasons:

There is no impact envisaged on, or opportunity to promote equality of opportunity for people within this category. However, the proposed reforms will be subject to a public consultation, and the responses to the consultation will be monitored to inform the position.

Dependants **- If Yes, provide details:**

N/A

If No, provide reasons:

There is no impact envisaged on, or opportunity to promote equality of opportunity for people within this category. However, the proposed

reforms will be subject to a public consultation, and the responses to the consultation will be monitored to inform the position.

3. **To what extent is the policy likely to impact on good relations between people of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group?**

Please provide details of the likely policy impact and determine the level of impact for each of the categories below i.e. either minor, major or none.

Details of the likely policy impacts on *Religious belief*:

None - All dog owners regardless of religious belief will be impacted equally with a ban on specific aversive training devices as no evidence suggests any religious group uses these devices more than any other or that it is linked to religious beliefs.

What is the level of impact? Minor ☐ Major ☐ None ☒
(select as appropriate)

Details of the likely policy impacts on *Political Opinion*:

None - All dog owners regardless of political opinion will be impacted equally with a ban on specific aversive training devices as no evidence suggests any political group uses these devices more than any other or that it is linked to political opinions.

What is the level of impact? Minor ☐ Major ☐ None ☒
(select as appropriate)

Details of the likely policy impacts on *Racial Group*:

None - All dog owners regardless of race will be impacted equally with a ban on specific aversive training devices as no evidence suggests any racial group uses these devices more than any other.

What is the level of impact? Minor ☐ Major ☐ None ☒
(select as appropriate)

4. **Are there opportunities to better promote good relations between people of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group?**

Detail opportunities of how this policy could better promote good relations for people within each of the Section 75 Categories below:

***Religious Belief* - If Yes, provide details:**

N/A

If No, provide reasons:

The Department has not identified any evidence to indicate such opportunities. However, the responses to the consultation will be monitored to inform the position.

***Political Opinion* - If Yes, provide details:**

N/A

If No, provide reasons:

The Department has not identified any evidence to indicate such opportunities. However, the responses to the consultation will be monitored to inform the position.

***Racial Group* - If Yes, provide details:**

N/A

If No, provide reasons:

The Department has not identified any evidence to indicate such opportunities. However, the responses to the consultation will be monitored to inform the position.

Additional considerations

Multiple identity

Generally speaking, people can fall into more than one Section 75 category. Taking this into consideration, are there any potential impacts of the policy/decision on people with multiple identities? If so, please detail below.

(For example; disabled minority ethnic people; disabled women; young Protestant men; and young lesbians, gay and bisexual people).

Provide details of data on the impact of the policy on people with multiple identities. Specify relevant Section 75 categories concerned.

There is no available evidence to indicate potential impacts on people with multiple identities. However, the responses to the consultation will be monitored to inform the position.

DAERA also has legislative obligations to meet under the **Disability Discrimination Order**. Questions 5 - 6 relate to these.

Consideration of Disability Duties

5. **Does this proposed policy or decision provide an opportunity for DAERA to better *promote positive attitudes* towards disabled people?**

The proposed policy would apply equally to all stakeholders. It is not anticipated that it will provide an opportunity to promote positive attitudes towards people with a disability. However, the responses to the consultation will be monitored to inform the position.

6. **Does this proposed policy or decision provide an opportunity to actively *increase the participation* by disabled people in public life?**

The proposed policy does not provide an opportunity to actively increase the participation by disabled people in public life. However, the responses to the consultation will be monitored to inform the position.

Part 3. Screening decision (Please delete as appropriate)

"Screened out" without mitigation or an alternative policy proposed to be adopted.

If the decision is *not to conduct an equality impact assessment*, please provide details of the reasons.

The policy will apply to all persons who keep companion pets, equally. An Equality and Human Rights Screening Exercise has been undertaken, which assessed evidence relating to s75 considerations, including equality of opportunity and good relations, and Disability Duties and Human Rights. The exercise has concluded that the policy would apply equally to all stakeholders.

If the decision is not to conduct an equality impact assessment the public authority should consider if the policy should *be mitigated or an alternative policy be introduced* - please provide details.

N/A. No mitigations or alternatives are needed. The policy will apply to all companion pet owners equally. A public consultation will however invite comments on the proposals, and on this Equality and Human Rights Screening Exercise, and responses will be monitored to further inform the position.

If the decision is to *subject the policy to an equality impact assessment*, please provide details of the reasons.

N/A

All public authorities' equality schemes must state the authority's arrangements for assessing and consulting on the likely impact of policies adopted or

proposed to be adopted by the authority on the promotion of equality of opportunity. The Commission recommends screening and equality impact assessment as the tools to be utilised for such assessments. Further advice on equality impact assessment may be found in a separate Commission publication: A Practical Guide to Equality Impact Assessment

Mitigation

When the public authority concludes that the likely impact is 'minor' and an equality impact assessment is not to be conducted, the public authority may consider mitigation to lessen the severity of any equality impact, or the introduction of an alternative policy to better promote equality of opportunity or good relations.

Can the policy/decision be amended or changed or an alternative policy introduced to better promote equality of opportunity and/or good relations? ☐ **Yes** ☒ **No** (select as appropriate)

If so, *give the reasons* to support your decision, together with the proposed changes/amendments or alternative policy.

N/A

Timetabling and prioritising

Factors to be considered in timetabling and prioritising policies for equality impact assessment.

If the policy has been 'screened in' for equality impact assessment, then please answer the following questions to determine its priority for timetabling the equality impact assessment.

On a scale of 1-3, with 1 being the lowest priority and 3 being the highest, assess the policy in terms of its priority for equality impact assessment.

Priority criterion	**Rating (1-3)**
Effect on equality of opportunity and good relations	N/A
Social need	N/A
Effect on people's daily lives	N/A
Relevance to a public authority's functions	N/A
Total score	N/A

Note: The Total Rating Score should be used to prioritise the policy in rank order with other policies screened in for equality impact assessment. This list of priorities will assist the public authority in timetabling. Details of the Public Authority's Equality Impact Assessment Timetable should be included in the quarterly Screening Report.

Is the policy affected by timetables established by other relevant public authorities? ☐ Yes ☒ No (select as appropriate)

If yes, please provide details.

N/A

Part 4. Monitoring

Section 75 places a requirement on DAERA to have equality monitoring arrangements in place in order to assess the impact of policies and services etc; and to help identify barriers to fair participation and to better promote equality of opportunity. Please note the following excerpt from The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland in relation to monitoring:

A system must be established to monitor the impact of the policy in order to find out its effect on relevant groups. The results of ongoing monitoring must be reviewed on an annual basis. The public authority is required to publish the results of this monitoring. And they must be included in the public authorities´ annual review on progress to the Equality Commission. The Equality Scheme must specify how and where such monitoring information will be published. It is therefore essential that monitoring is carried out in a systematic manner and that the results are widely and openly published.

If the monitoring and analysis of results over a two year period show that the policy results in greater adverse impact than predicted, or if opportunities arise which would allow for greater equality of opportunity to be promoted, the public authority must ensure that the policy is revised to achieve better outcomes for the relevant equality groups.

Further advice on monitoring can be found at: ECNI Monitoring Guidance for Public Authorities

Outline what data you will collect in the future in order to monitor the impact of this policy or decision on equality, good relations and disability duties.

Equality:

The Department will monitor feedback through the public consultation, including any evidence relating to equality impacts and will consider and evaluate prior to finalising the policy. If, or when, legislation is introduced, the Department will monitor impacts through engagement with councils during implementation.

Good Relations:

The Department will monitor feedback through the public consultation, including any evidence relating to equality impacts and will consider and evaluate prior to finalising the policy. If, or when, legislation is introduced, the Department will monitor impacts through engagement with councils during implementation.

Disability Duties:

The Department will monitor feedback through the public consultation, including any evidence relating to equality impacts and will consider and evaluate prior to finalising the policy. If, or when, legislation is introduced, the Department will monitor impacts through engagement with councils during implementation.

Part 5. Consideration of Human Rights

7. **The Human Rights Act (HRA) 1998 brings the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) into UK law and it applies in N Ireland. Indicate below by deleting Yes/No as appropriate, any potential *adverse impacts* that the policy or decision may have in relation to human rights issues.**

See Annex A for brief synopsis on each of the Human Rights Articles & Protocols.

Right to Life	**Article 2**	~~Yes~~/No
Prohibition of torture, inhuman or degrading treatment	**Article 3**	~~Yes~~/No
Prohibition of slavery and forced labour	**Article 4**	~~Yes~~/No
Right to liberty and security	**Article 5**	~~Yes~~/No
Right to a fair and public trial	**Article 6**	~~Yes~~/No
Right to no punishment without law	**Article 7**	~~Yes~~/No
Right to respect for private and family life, home and correspondence	**Article 8**	~~Yes~~/No
Right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion	**Article 9**	~~Yes~~/No
Right to freedom of expression	**Article 10**	~~Yes~~/No
Right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association	**Article 11**	~~Yes~~/No
Right to marry and to found a family	**Article 12**	~~Yes~~/No
The prohibition of discrimination	**Article 14**	~~Yes~~/No
Protection of property and enjoyment of possessions	**Protocol 1 Article 1**	~~Yes~~/No

Right to education	**Protocol 1 Article 2**	~~Yes~~/No
Right to free and secret elections	**Protocol 1 Article 3**	~~Yes~~/No

8. **Please explain any adverse impacts on human rights that you have identified.**

No adverse impact on human rights has been identified.

9. **Please indicate any ways which you consider the policy positively promotes human rights.**

No ways to positively promote human rights have been identified.

Part 6 - Approval and authorisation

Before signing off this screening template please confirm that you have completed all the actions listed below.

I can confirm that all the actions listed below have been completed -

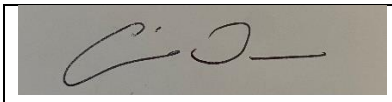
- I have explained any technical issues in plain English (easily understood by a 12 year old)
- I have used the most relevant, current & up to date data available
- I have added evidence and explained my assessments in full
- I have provided a brief note to justify my decision to ‘Screen In’ or ‘Screen Out’
- A copy of this screening template and the final decision has been sent to the Equality Unit for their consideration before it has been forwarded for sign-off

Screening assessment completed by (Staff Officer level or above) -

Name: **Chris Wade** **Grade: DP**

Branch: **Animal Welfare and Dog Control Policy Branch** **Date: 12 March 2026**

Signature: please insert a scanned image of your signature.

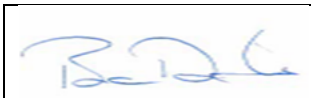


Screening decision approved by (must be Grade 3/Deputy Secretary or above) -

Name: Brian Dooher **Grade: 3**

Branch: VSAHG **Date: 16/4/26**

Signature: please insert a scanned image of your signature.



Note: A copy of the Screening Template, for each policy screened should be 'signed off' and approved by a senior manager responsible for the policy, made easily accessible on the public authority's website as soon as possible following completion and made available on request.

Please save the final signed version of the completed screening form in the CM container (AE2-19-11940) below as soon as possible after completion and forward the CM link to Equality Branch at equality@daera-ni.gov.uk. The screening template must be saved to the container in **HTML format** (not PDF) in order to comply with accessibility requirements. The screening form will be placed on the DAERA website and a link provided to the Department's Section 75 consultees.

Strategic
Management DAERA

For more information about equality screening, contact:

DAERA Equality Unit

Capacity, Capability, Equality & Diversity Branch

Jubilee House

111 Ballykelly Road

LIMAVADY

BT49 9HP

Email: equality@daera-ni.gov.uk

Tel: 028 7744 2027

Annex A

Synopsis of Human Rights Act Articles & Protocols

ARTICLE 2

Right to life

1. Everyone's right to life shall be protected by law. No one shall be deprived of his life intentionally save in the execution of a sentence of a court following his conviction of a crime for which this penalty is provided by law.
2. Deprivation of life shall not be regarded as inflicted in contravention of this Article when it results from the use of force which is no more than absolutely necessary:
    a. In defense of any person from unlawful violence;
    b. In order to effect a lawful arrest or to prevent the escape of a person lawfully detained;
    c. In action lawfully taken for the purpose of quelling a riot or insurrection.

ARTICLE 3

Prohibition of torture

No one shall be subjected to torture or to inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

ARTICLE 4

Prohibition of slavery and forced labour

1. No one shall be held in slavery or servitude.
2. No one shall be required to perform forced or compulsory labour.
3. For the purpose of this Article the term “forced or compulsory labour” shall not include:
    a. Any work required to be done in the ordinary course of detention imposed according to the provisions of Article 5 of this Convention or during conditional release from such detention;
    b. Any service of a military character or, in case of conscientious objectors in countries where they are recognised, service exacted instead of compulsory military service;
    c. Any service exacted in case of an emergency or calamity threatening the life or well-being of the community;
    d. Any work or service which forms part of normal civic obligations.

ARTICLE 5

Right to liberty and security

1. Everyone has the right to liberty and security of person. No one shall be deprived of his liberty save in the following cases and in accordance with a procedure prescribed by law:
    a. The lawful detention of a person after conviction by a competent court;
    b. The lawful arrest or detention of a person for non-compliance with the lawful order of a court or in order to secure the fulfilment of any obligation prescribed by law;
    c. the lawful arrest or detention of a person effected for the purpose of bringing him before the competent legal authority on reasonable

suspicion of having committed an offence or when it is reasonably considered necessary to prevent his committing an offence or fleeing after having done so;

d. the detention of a minor by lawful order for the purpose of educational supervision or his lawful detention for the purpose of bringing him before the competent legal authority;
e. The lawful detention of persons for the prevention of the spreading of infectious diseases, of persons of unsound mind, alcoholics or drug addicts or vagrants;
f. The lawful arrest or detention of a person to prevent his effecting an unauthorised entry into the country or of a person against whom action is being taken with a view to deportation or extradition.

2. Everyone who is arrested shall be informed promptly, in a language which he understands, of the reasons for his arrest and of any charge against him.
3. Everyone arrested or detained in accordance with the provisions of paragraph 1(c) of this Article shall be brought promptly before a judge or other officer authorised by law to exercise judicial power and shall be entitled to trial within a reasonable time or to release pending trial. Release may be conditioned by guarantees to appear for trial.
4. Everyone who is deprived of his liberty by arrest or detention shall be entitled to take proceedings by which the lawfulness of his detention shall be decided speedily by a court and his release ordered if the detention is not lawful.
5. Everyone who has been the victim of arrest or detention in contravention of the provisions of this Article shall have an enforceable right to compensation.

ARTICLE 6

Right to a fair trial

1. In the determination of his civil rights and obligations or of any criminal charge against him, everyone is entitled to a fair and public hearing within a reasonable time by an independent and impartial tribunal established by law. Judgment shall be pronounced publicly but the press and public may be excluded from all or part of the trial in the interest of morals, public order or national security in a democratic society, where the interests of juveniles or the protection of the private life of the parties so require, or to the extent strictly necessary in the opinion of the court in special circumstances where publicity would prejudice the interests of justice.
2. Everyone charged with a criminal offence shall be presumed innocent until proved guilty according to law.
3. Everyone charged with a criminal offence has the following minimum rights:
    a. To be informed promptly, in a language which he understands and in detail, of the nature and cause of the accusation against him;
    b. To have adequate time and facilities for the preparation of his defense;
    c. To defend himself in person or through legal assistance of his own choosing or, if he has not sufficient means to pay for legal assistance, to be given it free when the interests of justice so require;
    d. To examine or have examined witnesses against him and to obtain the attendance and examination of witnesses on his behalf under the same conditions as witnesses against him;
    e. To have the free assistance of an interpreter if he cannot understand or speak the language used in court.

ARTICLE 7

No punishment without law

1. No one shall be held guilty of any criminal offence on account of any act or omission which did not constitute a criminal offence under national or international law at the time when it was committed. Nor shall a heavier penalty be imposed than the one that was applicable at the time the criminal offence was committed.
2. This Article shall not prejudice the trial and punishment of any person for any act or omission which, at the time when it was committed, was criminal according to the general principles of law recognised by civilised nations.

ARTICLE 8

Right to respect for private and family life

1. Everyone has the right to respect for his private and family life, his home and his correspondence.
2. There shall be no interference by a public authority with the exercise of this right except such as is in accordance with the law and is necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security, public safety or the economic well-being of the country, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.

ARTICLE 9

Freedom of thought, conscience and religion

1. Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief, in worship, teaching, practice and observance.
2. Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs shall be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of public safety, for the protection of public order, health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.

ARTICLE 10

Freedom of expression

1. Everyone has the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers. This Article shall not prevent States from requiring the licensing of broadcasting, television or cinema enterprises.
2. The exercise of these freedoms, since it carries with it duties and responsibilities, may be subject to such formalities, conditions, restrictions or penalties as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society, in the interests of national security, territorial integrity or public safety, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals, for the protection of the reputation or rights of others, for preventing the disclosure of information received in confidence, or for maintaining the authority and impartiality of the judiciary.

ARTICLE 11

Freedom of assembly and association

1. Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and to freedom of association with others, including the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his interests.
2. No restrictions shall be placed on the exercise of these rights other than such as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security or public safety, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others. This Article shall not prevent the imposition of lawful restrictions on the exercise of these rights by members of the armed forces, of the police or of the administration of the State.

ARTICLE 12

Right to marry

Men and women of marriageable age have the right to marry and to found a family, according to the national laws governing the exercise of this right.

ARTICLE 14

Prohibition of discrimination

The enjoyment of the rights and freedoms set forth in this Convention shall be secured without discrimination on any ground such as sex, race, colour, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth or other status.

Protocol 1

ARTICLE 1

Protection of property

Every natural or legal person is entitled to the peaceful enjoyment of his possessions. No one shall be deprived of his possessions except in the public interest and subject to the conditions provided for by law and by the general principles of international law.

The preceding provisions shall not, however, in any way impair the right of a State to enforce such laws as it deems necessary to control the use of property in accordance with the general interest or to secure the payment of taxes or other contributions or penalties.

Protocol 1

ARTICLE 2

Right to education

No person shall be denied the right to education. In the exercise of any functions which it assumes in relation to education and to teaching, the State shall respect the right of parents to ensure such education and teaching in conformity with their own religious and philosophical convictions.

Protocol 1

ARTICLE 3

Right to free elections

The High Contracting Parties undertake to hold free elections at reasonable intervals by secret ballot, under conditions which will ensure the free expression of the opinion of the people in the choice of the legislature.

For further information:

Equality Unit,
Equality & Diversity Branch
Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA)
Jubilee House
111 Ballykelly Road
Ballykelly
Limavady
BT49 9HP

Tel: 028 7744 2027
Email: equality@daera-ni.gov.uk

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Consultation on Proposed Animal Welfare Policy Reforms in Northern Ireland

Written Response Template

About you

Q1. What is your name?

Helen Morrissey

Q2. What is your email address?

morrisseyh@belfastcity.gov.uk

Q3. Are the views and opinions in your response personal or expressed on behalf of an organisation?

☐ Personal

X Organisation

If the views and opinions expressed are on behalf of an organisation, please provide the name of the organisation below.

Belfast City Council

Q4. Please indicate if you are happy for your response to be published.

X Yes

☐ No

Q5. If you are responding on behalf of an organisation, please indicate if you are content for the name of the organisation to be associated with your response.

X Yes

☐ No

☐ Not Applicable

POLICY PROPOSALS

The consultation seeks views on proposed changes across four key policy areas:

- the regulation of rescue and rehoming organisations;
- an inflationary increase in dog licence fees;
- a ban on specific aversive training devices; and
- strengthened microchipping requirements for dogs.

In addition, the consultation includes a call for evidence on the mandatory microchipping of pet cats.

Full details of the proposals and the relevant consultation questions are set out in the consultation document.

Respondents may choose to comment on any or all of the policy areas outlined above.

REGULATION OF RESCUE AND REHOMING ORGANISATIONS

Q6. Do you agree that all rescue and rehoming organisations that rehome more than five animals annually should be inspected and licensed?

☐ Yes

X No

Comments

The Council supports the overall policy objective of improving animal welfare standards, increasing transparency and addressing gaps in the current unregulated rescue and rehoming sector.

However, where the licensing threshold is set at **more than five animals rehomed per year**, there is a risk that this may capture small-scale, occasional or ad-hoc rehoming activity that does not present the same level of risk as larger, organised operations. In the RIA it is acknowledged that there is a risk that the new regulation will place a burden on smaller organisations, potentially reducing rehoming capacity or leading to closure.

Council believes regulatory focus should be directed toward larger-scale rescue and rehoming organisations, where activity is more frequent, structured and potentially commercial in nature, rather than individuals undertaking infrequent rehoming in a domestic setting. This would minimise the risk of closures and a reduction in rehoming capacity and reduce the administrative and enforcement burden for the enforcing authority.

Whilst the Council agrees in principle with regulation of the sector, it is our view the proposed regulation more closely aligns with DAERA's current licensing functions of establishments such as boarding kennels, zoos and pet shops.

We are not in favour of becoming the enforcing authority. There is a strong case for the regulation of this sector by DAERA as this alignment would:

- Promote consistency and clarity for operators and the public;
- Allow use of existing processes and expertise;
- Reduce administrative burden; and
- Improve enforceability.

Without this alignment, there is a risk of inconsistency and inefficiency.

Council believe this option has not been fully explored and could easily be implemented within the existing frameworks either by authorisation under existing legislation and/or allocation of legislative powers to DAERA and setting up a centralised licensing team of all animal related establishments.

Animals rescued by rehoming organisations can have behavioural welfare needs and complex health needs, requiring veterinary treatment. Rescued animals are not solely companion animals and can include dangerous wild animals, wildlife or farmed animals, all of which are currently outside scope of Council's responsibilities and skill resource.

Council officers are not fully equipped to deal with a licensing scheme of this nature. We strongly believe it is advantageous for the presence of a DAERA qualified vet during annual inspections and in response to complaints, particularly in relation to licensing conditions such as enrichment, identification of signs of disease, administration of unprescribed medication. A similar recommendation for veterinary oversight was recently made by the Expert Advisory Panel following the review of Dog Breeding Establishment regulation.

Council is of the view that there has not been sufficient engagement with all councils, particularly in relation the Department's evidence about fees and associated costs should the Department continue with the assumed position that councils will become the licensing authority. The RIA notes the risk that licence fees may not fully offset councils' administrative and inspection costs, especially in areas with many or complex rescue and rehoming operations. We agree that councils could, or more likely would, be left with shortfall in income which could place additional strain on council budgets and resources potentially affecting the quality and frequency of inspections and enforcement.

We wish to remind DAERA that there were previous agreed positions between councils and DAERA during the consultation and implementation phase leading up to the implementation of the Welfare of Animals Act (NI) 2011 which did not include adding additional responsibilities upon councils in the future.

This Council is already operating our Animal Welfare Service in a financially constrained environment, following the withdrawal of the annual funding by DAERA in August 2023. Although we are encouraged by the questions raised about Animal Welfare funding by the AERA Committee on 16th April 2026, at present the full financial burden rests with ratepayers and additional enforcement obligations will add to this cost.

Belfast City Council currently employs 2 Animal Welfare Officers, 12 Dog Wardens and 2 Dog Warden Supervisors who are fully employed fulfilling current duties whilst operating in a prioritised and financially constrained manner. Their duties have recently been extended, by an additional category of dangerous dog, which has been challenging and complex. It was disappointing that DAERA introduced the XL Bully legislation without any additional funding for ongoing costs.

It must be stressed that any further intentions by DAERA to make councils responsible for future changes in Animal Welfare legislation, without adequate funding on an ongoing basis, will have significant financial implications for the Council.

Q7. Do you agree that all rescue and rehoming organisations that care for eight or more animals (or five or more dogs) should be inspected and licensed?

☐ Yes

X No

Comments

The Council supports the overall policy objective of improving animal welfare standards, increasing transparency, and addressing gaps in the current unregulated rescue and rehoming sector.

However, where the licensing threshold is set threshold is set at **care for** eight or more animals (five or more dogs) rehomed per year, there is a risk that this may capture small-scale, occasional or ad-hoc rehoming activity that does not present the same level of risk as larger, organised operations. In the RIA it is acknowledged that there is a risk that the new regulation will place a burden on smaller organisations, potentially reducing rehoming capacity or leading to closure.

We believe regulatory focus should be directed toward larger-scale rescue and rehoming organisations, where activity is more frequent, structured and potentially commercial in nature, rather than individuals undertaking infrequent rehoming in a domestic setting. This would minimise the risk of closures and a reduction in rehoming capacity and reduce administrative and enforcement burden for the enforcing authority.

Council would highlight the challenges in relation to foster caring arrangements within the rescue and rehoming sector. Foster caring is an essential component and any regulatory framework must recognise its unique characteristics. Without proportionate treatment, there is a risk of:

- Reducing fostering capacity;
- Driving activity underground; and
- Creating inconsistent enforcement.

The Department must ensure the regulatory framework explicitly addresses the following:

- Definition of “rescue and rehoming activity’;
- Whether foster homes are included directly, or regulated through a parent organisation;
- Treatment of independent individuals rehoming animals informally not part of an organisation.

We would reiterate that whilst the Council welcomes actions to improve animal welfare it does not agree that councils should be allocated responsibility for the licensing and enforcement of rescue and rehoming organisations.

It is our view the proposed regulation more closely aligns with DAERA current licensing functions of establishments such as boarding kennels, zoos, pet shops.

Council are not in favour of becoming the enforcing authority. There is a strong case for the regulation of this sector by DAERA as this alignment would:

- Promote consistency and clarity for operators and the public;
- Allow use of existing processes and expertise;

- Reduce administrative burden; and
- Improve enforceability.

Without alignment, there is a risk of inconsistency, and inefficiency.

Council believe this has not been fully explored and could easily be implemented within the existing frameworks either by authorisation under existing legislation and / or allocation of legislative powers to DAERA and setting up a centralised licensing team of all animal related establishments.

Animals rescued by rehoming organisations can have behavioural welfare needs and complex health needs, requiring veterinary treatment. Rescued animals are not solely companion animals and can include dangerous wild animals, wildlife or farmed animals, all of which are currently outside scope of Council's responsibilities and skill resource.

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We wish to remind DAERA that there were previous agreed positions between councils and DAERA during the consultation and implementation phase leading up to the implementation of the Welfare of Animals Act (NI) 2011 which did not include adding additional responsibilities upon councils in the future.

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was disappointing that DAERA introduced the XL Bully legislation without any additional funding for ongoing costs.

It must be stressed that any further intentions by DAERA to make councils responsible for future changes in Animal Welfare legislation, without adequate funding on an ongoing basis, will have significant financial implications for the Council.

Q8. Do you agree with the proposed licence conditions, as listed in the consultation document?

X Yes

☐ No

Comments

Council reiterates that whilst we welcome actions to improve animal welfare we **do not agree that councils should be allocated responsibility for the licensing and enforcement of rescue and rehoming organisations.**

The licensing conditions should clearly define 'establishment', whether a single premises based model or if includes foster network. Whilst we agree with the proposed licence conditions in principle, the following comments should be duly considered:

General - **AGREE**

Animal Numbers - **AGREE**
However, the term "*must not exceed maximum that is reasonable"* is subjective and open to interpretation. It creates a risk of inconsistent enforcement and uncertainty for operators, suggest clear assessment criteria or indicative thresholds.

Staffing - **AGREE**
The emphasis on competence and training is welcomed, although it is recognised that some organisations may struggle with formal training polices and the cost of gaining qualifications.

Environment / Establishment – **AGREE**

Suitable Diet – **AGREE**

Enrichment / Handling / Protection from Suffering, Injury and Disease – **AGREE**
Rehoming – **AGREE**
We welcome the transparency in advertising and the provision of information to adopters.

Wild Animals – **AGREE**

However, the term "*if the release area is suitable for the species'"* is open to interpretation, suggest clear guidance is provided.

Council notes that only 9 of the approximately 68 identified rescue and rehoming centres are ADCH Members and we would therefore dispute the DAERA assumption that many already meet Minimum Welfare and Operation Standards. This figure of 68 may be an underestimate, particularly if home based foster networks and independent rescuers are included.

We anticipate many organisations will be impacted by the licencing requirements and there could be a high level of non-compliance once the regime is introduced.

The proposed licence conditions, whilst well-intentioned in safeguarding animal welfare, may prove disproportionate for smaller and volunteer-led rescue organisations, particularly those operating foster care models within domestic settings.

Greater clarity is required regarding licensing thresholds, the status of foster homes, and whether responsibility rests with the overarching organisation or individual carers.

Additionally, clarity is needed on the setting of maximum animal numbers, the extent of enforcing authority discretion and the practicality of meeting premises-based requirements such as space, heating and isolation in non-commercial environments, alongside ensuring that enforcement officers have appropriate competencies to assess the standards consistently.

Impact Assessments

Q9. Do you have any comments to make in relation to the Regulatory Impact Assessment for the Regulation of Rescue and Rehoming Organisations, and its conclusions, or any additional information regarding impacts/costs?

X Yes

☐ No

Comments

The consultation proposal reflects a concerning and growing trend whereby central government seeks to devolve enforcement responsibilities to local government without a corresponding transfer of resources, powers, or legal protections. Councils cannot continue to absorb additional responsibilities by default, particularly where they fall outside our core remit and expertise.

Council is of the view that there has not been sufficient engagement with all councils, particularly on the Department's evidence about fees and associated costs. Council therefore believes that any of the assumptions made on cost to the ratepayer which are based on the RIA are flawed and do not accurately address the potential budgetary implications.

The RIA significantly underestimates the time, staffing, training and compliance costs for both organisations and councils. Inspection and licensing activities are expected to require significant officer time. The estimate of staff costs of £20 per hour, including employer NI, pension etc. is a less than half the true cost. We also note a substantial underestimate of the impact of having to provide and maintain a public register. Any associated fees should provide full cost recovery for inspections, administration, data management and enforcement aspects, including additional staff costs. Fees set by individual councils can lead to inconsistencies.

The proposals will place substantial additional demands on councils, particularly on Animal Welfare Officers and Dog Wardens. Current officers are not fully equipped to deliver a new licensing regime of this nature and Council would not be able to deliver the proposed enforcement regime using our current resources.

Concerns include:

- Specialist knowledge gaps;
- Training requirements;
- Staffing implications;
    - Additional staff will be required
    - Potential need for higher-grade or specialist roles, leading to:
- Increased salary costs; and
- Workforce restructuring.

This has not been fully accounted for in the RIA.

We would also highlight the real concern for the perception of a conflict of interest of regulating a sector which councils rely heavily on for the rehoming of stray and unwanted dogs.

A further key concern is that the proposals may have unintended consequences for the sector, including:

Closure of smaller organisations:

- Due to cost, administrative burden, or inability to meet licensing requirements
- Particularly volunteer-led and rural organisations

Reduced rehoming capacity:

Councils rely heavily on these organisations to:

- Rehome unclaimed stray dogs
- Manage unwanted animals

Loss of capacity will result in:

- Increased kennelling pressures
- Higher costs for councils
- Potential welfare issues if animals cannot be rehomed promptly

Displacement effects:
Closure of regulated operators may lead to:

- Growth in unregulated or informal activity
- Increased enforcement challenges

A more robust evidence base is required before implementation as the current information available lacks a complete official picture of all rescue centres across the country. In the absence of a precise figure, it is difficult to apportion costs associated with inspection and licensing. It is also worth highlighting the huge rise in independent rescues, often unregistered and running from private homes without any formal charitable status.

In light of DAERA's previous cut to Animal Welfare funding, the additional duties will have a significant financial impact on councils implementing the proposals. A further detailed financial appraisal of the true costs associated with IT and Database systems, staffing, inspections and administration, and enforcement is required.

At present, it is difficult to see that setting a licence fee will be significant enough to recoup all administrative and enforcement expenses, without the local ratepayer having to subsidise the system. **It is our view that to be implemented effectively, any inspection and licensing regime will require a direct and sustained funding stream from DAERA.**

Q10. Do you have any comments to make in relation to the Rural Needs Impact Assessment or the Equality and Disability Screening for the Regulation of Rescue and Rehoming Organisations, and their conclusions?

X Yes

☐ No

Comments

Rural and smaller rescue organisations may be disproportionately affected. Support, guidance and engagement from the Department will be important to maintain financial viability and to avoid unintended closures.

DOG LICENCE FEES

Q11. Do you agree with the proposed inflationary increase across all categories of dog licence fees as set out in the consultation document?

X Yes

☐ No

Comments

Dog licence income does not cover the full cost of licensing and dog warden services and current fees remain low compared with the general cost of dog ownership. A greater outlay would promote more careful consideration before making a decision to own a dog, aligning with the aim of promoting responsible dog ownership.

The proposed inflationary increases provide a modest rise in income but do not meet growing service demands, including enforcement linked to XL Bully legislation and proposed additional statutory responsibilities regarding puppies and kittens and dog breeding establishments.

As the majority of licences are concessionary or free this limits the ability for councils to close significant funding gaps. It is inevitable that costs will continue to rise and our capability to improve enforcement, achieve greater dog control compliance and public safety outcomes will be limited based on this modest increase.

Through NIDAG, councils have provided the Department with evidence of reflective costs of dog control services, including forecasting income estimates informed by Ulster University research.

Around 70% of dog licences are either free or concessionary (fee of £5.00). **Councils recommend the removal of the concessionary licence fee as current administration costs outweigh the licence cost, particularly where documentation / verification checks are required prior to a licence being issued.**

Council suggests an annual dog licence fee in the region of **£25** without concessionary discounts, would be considered reasonable, justified and provide full cost recovery to some but not all councils. If this was agreed the proposed £47.50 for a block licence would also have to be increased.

An automatic annual index-linked inflationary increase should be incorporated within the proposed legislative amendment so that councils do not have to wait for further review and legislative changes to allow for future increases.

Should DAERA be minded to retaining a concessionary element, we would favour a higher fee of £15.00, including a review of the award criteria. Retention of a reduced fee for dogs that have been neutered / sterilised is preferred, as it serves as an incentive to promote

responsible dog ownership, ultimately reducing the number of unwanted dogs. Council would also suggest a nominal fee for the current free licences which are often a significant proportion of licences.

Impact Assessments

Q12. Do you have any comments to make in relation to the Regulatory Impact Assessment for the proposed increase in Dog Licence Fees, including its conclusions, or any additional information regarding impacts/costs?

X Yes

☐ No

Comments

The proposed inflationary increases would only provide a modest rise in income and do not meet growing service demands. Dog control services are resource-intensive and demand continues to increase, meaning councils are required to subsidise provision from general budgets.

A key structural issue within the current licensing model is the high proportion of licences that generate little or no income. In Belfast in 2025/26:

- 12% of licences were issued free of charge; and
- Just over 50 % were issued at a concessionary rate

This results in:

- A significantly reduced income base
- A mismatch between:
  - The number of licensed dogs
  - The funding available to regulate and enforce

The Department have failed to consider the limitations of full-cost recovery through licence fees under the existing structure.

Q13. Do you have any comments to make in relation to the Rural Needs Impact Assessment or the Equality and Disability Screening for the proposed increase in Dog Licence Fees, and their conclusions?

☐ Yes

X No

Comments

BAN ON SPECIFIC AVERSIVE TRAINING DEVICES

Q14. Do you agree that the use of handheld remote controlled electric shock collars (e-collars) on dogs and cats should be banned?

X Yes

☐ No

Comments

Council is fully supportive of a ban on the use of handheld remote controlled electric shock collars on dogs and cats and would support the message that positive reinforcement, reward-based training should be employed. Whilst we support a ban on the use of such devices, **a ban on the sale and possession of handheld remote controlled electric shock collars (E-collars) would be preferred.** In addition, we would request that due consideration is given to implementing a legislative change, to facilitate the seizure of such devices, as well as an option to issue a Fixed Penalty Notice where an offence has been committed.

Q15. Do you agree that the use of choke collars on dogs and cats should be banned?

X Yes

☐ No

Comments

Council is fully supportive of a ban on the use of choke collars on dogs and cats and would support the message that positive reinforcement, reward-based training should be employed.

Whilst we support a ban on the use of such devices, **a ban on the sale and possession of choke collars would be preferred.**

In addition, we would request that due consideration is given to implementing a legislative change, to facilitate the seizure of such devices, as well as an option to issue a Fixed Penalty Notice where an offence has been committed.

Q16. Do you agree that the use of prong collars on dogs and cats should be banned?

X Yes

☐ No

Comments

Council is fully supportive of a ban on the use of prong collars on dogs and cats and would support the message that positive reinforcement, reward-based training should be employed.

Whilst we support a ban on the use of such devices, **a ban on the sale and possseion of prong collars would be preferred.**

In addition, we would request that due consideration is given to implementing a legislative change, to facilitate the seizure of such devices, as well as an option to issue a Fixed Penalty Notice where an offence has been committed.

Impact Assessments

Q17. Do you have any comments to make in relation to the Regulatory Impact Assessment for the proposed Ban on Specific Aversive Training Devices, including its conclusions, or any additional information regarding impacts/costs?

X Yes

☐ No

Comments

While option 3B appears to offer the most proportionate and practical approach to improving animal welfare, enforcement is likely to be difficult without legislation an option to issue a Fixed Penalty Notice where an offence has been committed.

The absence of powers to seize devices used unlawfully could also hinder enforcement and render enforcement disproportionate to other dog control offences. Potential confusion may occur in distinguishing prohibited devices from visually similar but lawful alternatives, creating practical challenges for compliance and enforcement.

A ban on the sale and possession of specific Aversive Training Devices would be preferred.

Q18. Do you have any comments to make in relation to the Rural Needs Impact Assessment or the Equality and Disability Screening for the proposed Ban on Specific Aversive Training Devices, and their conclusions?

☐ Yes
X No

Comments

STRENGTHENING MICROCHIPPING REQUIREMENTS FOR DOGS

Q19. Do you agree that owners should be required to update any changes onto the relevant microchip databases within a specified time, such as 14 days?

X Yes
☐ No

Comments

We see no role for councils in enforcing this requirement.

Council have no objection to a requirement to notify change of details within a specified timeframe. The notification period should however be practical and realistic for dog owners to comply with, 14 days is reasonable, suggest between 21 - 28 days maybe more appropriate. The obligation should remain with the owner, without creating unnecessary bureaucracy.

Imposing an arbitrary statutory timeframe could prove to be impractical and difficult to enforce, resulting in inconsistent, disproportionate and costly enforcement action for a relatively minor offence.

NIDAG informed DAERA in 2023 and more recently in 2025, of council officer views for regulation of microchip database providers, to facilitate a smaller number of centrally operated databases available in one search location.

NIDAG called for the exploration of the setting up a single point of entry to query existing multiple real time databases. The facility to enter a microchip number into a single web-based portal that could check all microchip databases would minimise the need for a manual search and increase efficiency.

Q20. Do you agree that the owner must indicate if they are / are not the breeder of the dog?

X Yes

☐ No

Comments

We see no role for councils in enforcing this requirement.

Council has no objection to this requirement. However, we would see no role for councils in enforcing it. It is our view that it is the responsibility of the implanter to record and provide breeder information (if known) at the point of microchipping

The requirement for an owner to declare their status if they are / are not the breeder on a database will assist with traceability but only if the breeder information has also been recorded and remains a ‘secondary’ contact. This could facilitate councils tracing back to potential unlicenced breeders and inform targeted interventions.

Q21. Do you agree that all dogs should be microchipped before they are older than eight weeks?

X Yes

☐ No

Comments

We see no role for councils in enforcing this requirement.

Council has no objection to this requirement. However we see no role for councils in enforcing it. Councils already require and record microchip details as part of the dog licence application process and enforce non-compliance with licencing requirements.

Council also recognises that microchipping before 8 weeks may not be appropriate in some cases, for example where a puppy is a very small breed, has a health condition, or where implantation could cause an adverse effect. Exemptions should therefore remain available for such circumstances, subject to advice and agreement following consultation with the Northern Ireland Veterinary Association.

Impact Assessments

Q22. Do you have any comments to make in relation to the Regulatory Impact Assessment for Strengthening Microchipping Requirements for dogs, including its conclusions, or any additional information regarding impacts/costs?

X Yes

☐ No

Comments

We see no role for councils in enforcing these requirements.

If councils were obligated to enforce these requirements, there would be significant financial and resource impacts on councils to ensure compliance in relation to the estimated 180,000 un-chipped dogs in NI.

The RIA acknowledges significant data gaps and does not address the costs to councils in terms of enforcement activity associated with estimated high levels of non-compliance particularly in the absence of Fixed Penalty Notices and the likely expectation of the public to enforce. Any action taken by councils must be appropriate and proportionate, in line with existing Enforcement Policies. The inability to offer a Fixed Penalty Notice, would not align with our enforcement response to other more significant dog control offences.

Council would stress that the RIA is not robust from a council service delivery perspective and does not quantify council enforcement burdens, despite the major operational implications, which include the requirement to:

- Check compliance at the point of licensing;
- Investigate non-compliance (no chip, outdated details);
- Follow up changes within 14 day requirement;

and the likely increase in legal proceedings and repeat enforcement visits.

The proposal assumes existing staff can absorb the work and this is not the case. The Council reiterates there will be a need for additional staff, in both administrative and enforcement roles.

The RIA also fails to account for public engagement, increased reporting and an initial surge in activity.

This adds to the growing trend of additional new enforcement duties without additional funding or mechanism to fully recover costs.

Whilst the Council supports the objective of improving traceability, the RIA does not adequately reflect the operational and financial burden on councils. In particular, the absence of staffing, IT, administrative costs and quantified enforcement presents a significant gap. The proposals assume improved outcomes without recognising the scale of current non-compliance or the resource required to achieve behavioural change.

Q23. Do you have any comments to make in relation to the Rural Needs Impact Assessment or the Equality and Disability Screening for Strengthening Microchipping Requirements for dogs, and their conclusions?

☐ Yes
X No

Comments

CALL FOR EVIDENCE ON MICROCHIPPING OF CATS

Q24. Do you keep, or own, one or more cats?

☐ Yes
X No

If Yes, please answer Q25 below.

Q25. Is your cat microchipped?

☐ I have one cat, it is microchipped.
☐ I have one cat; it is not microchipped.
☐ I have more than one cat, none are microchipped.
☐ I have more than one cat, some are microchipped.
☐ I have more than one cat, all are microchipped.

Q26. What benefits, if any, do you think the microchipping of pet cats could bring?

Please provide any evidence, data or examples to support your views.

Councils have no role in the ownership, traceability and identification of cats.

In general, Council agree that the microchipping of cats assists with the traceability and identification of 'owned cats '. Where owners keep their details accurate and up to date, databases play an important role in reuniting these animals with their owners. Council officers recognise microchipping may assist in reuniting lost cats with owners, help identify cats involved in traffic accidents and assist in identifying former owners where cats have been abandoned.

However, we believe the objectives can be achieved without the imposition of a mandatory legal requirement to microchip cats, through the promotion of overall responsible cat ownership led by DAERA, including promoting the health and welfare benefits of microchipping, neutering and vaccination to owners.

Other interested stakeholders such as Cats Protection and similar animal charities are best placed to deliver such campaigns with the appropriate level of funding from DAERA and supported by councils.

Q27. What challenges, if any, do you think the microchipping of pet cats could bring?

Please provide any evidence, data or examples to support your views.

Councils have no role in the ownership, traceability and identification of cats.

Council has identified a number of challenges associated with requirement to microchip pet cats, including:

- Ensuring owners regularly update ownership details, including changes to contact information when rehoming.
- Fees are often charged by database providers for registering and updating microchip records.
- The absence of a central database. Multiple databases currently hold animal microchip records, making access more complex. Council would welcome tighter regulation of database providers to support a smaller number of centrally operated systems, available through a single search point. In the interim, closer working relationships with existing providers would help ensure a more consistent approach to accessing information.
- Potential risks associated with implantation.

There are also a number of challenges, specifically from a council service delivery perspective:

- Microchip data has limited evidential value, as it does not conclusively prove ownership.
- The free-roaming nature of cats makes it difficult for councils to establish a 'pet cat', resulting in challenges in determining whether enforcement action for non-compliance is appropriate.
- Effective record keeping and the use of existing, or cost to upgrade, IT systems.
- The absence of a Fixed Penalty Notice option for what may be regarded as a relatively minor offence, creates a risk of inconsistent, costly and disproportionate enforcement under the proposed framework.
- In the absence of proportionate enforcement tools, councils would bear the financial burden of any prosecutions.
-

We believe the objectives can be achieved without the imposition of a mandatory legal requirement to microchip cats, through the promotion of overall responsible cat ownership led by DAERA, including promoting the health and welfare benefits of microchipping, neutering and vaccination to owners. Other interested stakeholders such as Cats Protection and similar animal charities are best placed to deliver such campaigns with the appropriate level of funding from DAERA and supported by councils.

Q28. What do you think might present a barrier for cat owners to microchip their pet cats?

Please provide any evidence, data or examples to support your views.

Due to the current cost of living crisis the responsibility of microchipping a pet cat through vets and the costs incurred would add an undue burden to individuals, especially where there are households with multiple cats.

In a rural areas the inconvenience in terms of proximity to a Veterinary Practice or other microchip provider is likely to be a barrier. It is acknowledged that some cat owners may have concerns around the potential risks of microchip migration, complications at the time of implantation, or of pain or stress caused to their pet.
Some owners may also have concerns that vets, rescue and rehoming shelters, councils etc, may fail to proactively scan lost cats for microchip details and therefore see no benefit in microchipping their cat.

If contact details change, owners are likely to have additional costs to update the microchip database.

Q29. Are there any other challenges that should be considered, in relation to mandatory microchipping of pet cats?

Please provide any evidence, data or examples to support your views.

Whilst Council agrees microchipping of cats would assist in the circumstances highlighted, we question the effectiveness and proportionality of a mandatory microchipping requirement.

We believe this objective can be achieved without the imposition of a mandatory legal requirement to microchip cats, through the promotion of overall responsible cat ownership led by DAERA, including promoting the health and welfare benefits of microchipping, neutering and vaccination to owners.

It is our view, that it is more appropriate to fund other interested stakeholders such as Cats Protection and similar animal charities to deliver 'wrap around' widespread education programmes supported by the provision of cat neutering / spaying vouchers. This engagement approach is much more appropriate and proportionate than immediately moving to a regulatory enforcement regime for cat management.

We see no role for councils in the enforcement of any mandatory microchipping of cats. Councils are not resourced, skilled or equipped to deal with the management / control of cats and would not have the capacity to take on an additional enforcement responsibility. It is our view the microchipping of cats should be placed with an interested stakeholder.

It is also recognised, there is not the same rationale for the mandatory microchipping of cats as there is for dogs, i.e. control of stray dogs, protecting public safety etc, This does not apply to the same extent, or in the same way, to cats as free roaming animals, or their

owners. Cats are free-roaming animals and owners / responsible persons could easily deny responsibility for un-chipped cats.

Before considering the introduction of mandatory microchipping for cats, the issues relating to separate microchip databases also need to be addressed.

Council officers are of the view that enforcement should not be a main focus in relation to cats, rather an appropriate stakeholder could be supported and tasked to deliver guidance and education initiatives in schools and communities to promote responsible cat ownership.

Council believes the mandatory requirement would be unworkable, as there is no clear mechanism to distinguish between feral and unowned cats and pet cats. Attempting to enforce microchipping in such circumstances would be impractical.

Council strongly believes that mandatory microchipping in respect of cats would pose enforcement difficulties given the behaviour traits of many cats in roaming, establishing territories and moving between several 'owners' in many cases. It would clearly be difficult to manage public expectations and protect the reputation of the service, where enforcement action is not considered to be in the public interest.

Councils should not be viewed as an existing enforcement body for cats simply because they operate long standing and financially supported enforcement for dog control – which in itself is not self financing but rather is supplemented by the ratepayer.

It must be stressed that any further intentions by DAERA to make councils responsible for future changes in Animal Welfare legislation, including mandatory microchipping of cats without adequate funding on an ongoing basis, would have significant financial implications for the Council.

It is the view of the Council that the microchipping of cats should be placed with an interested stakeholder.

Council budgets are already under significant pressure, and officers must continue to prioritise other Animal Welfare duties, including enforcement of the recently introduced XL Bully legislation, which requires substantial officer time.

As noted in relation to dogs, there is no single centralised database that council officers can readily access, resulting in time-consuming checks across multiple databases to confirm whether a microchip is registered.

Council remains of the view that cat microchipping would be better delivered through a centralised or charitable framework, rather than imposed on councils without the tools, officers and financial resources needed to enforce compliance.

Q30. Are there any other challenges, including for any other type of cats, which should be considered?

Please provide any evidence, data or examples to support your views.

Any requirement for feral cats to be microchipped would be unworkable, as there is no clear mechanism to distinguish between feral and unowned cats. Attempting to enforce microchipping in such circumstances would be impractical.

For feral cats we support the Trap – Neuter - Return approach by interested stakeholders which is more beneficial for animal welfare than microchipping of feral cats.

Council would also highlight that there should be exemptions included within the proposed legislation to cover a situation a pet cat has a medically certified health condition.

Q31. Is there anything else you would like DAERA to consider on this issue?

Please provide any evidence, data or examples to support your views.

We believe the objectives can be achieved without the imposition of a mandatory legal requirement to microchip cats, through the promotion of overall responsible cat ownership led by DAERA, including promoting the health and welfare benefits of microchipping, neutering and vaccination to owners.

Other interested stakeholders such as Cats Protection and similar animal charities are best placed to deliver such campaigns with the appropriate level of funding from DAERA and supported by councils.

For feral cats we support the Trap – Neuter - Return approach by interested stakeholders which is more beneficial for animal welfare than microchipping of feral cats.

In addition, other alternatives include visible identification such as collars with contact details, tattooing, or voluntary local registration schemes.

Written responses should be sent to:

E-mail: animalwelfarepolicy@daera-ni.gov.uk

Postal address: Animal Welfare and Dog Control Policy Branch

Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA)

Jubilee House

111 Ballykelly Road

Ballykelly

Limavady

BT49 9HP

Closing Date for Responses is Tuesday 30 June 2026.

PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

Belfast City Council

Subject:	Pride of Place Awards 2026
Date:	9th June 2026
Reporting Officer:	Jim Girvan, Director of Neighbourhood Services
Contact Officer:	Frances Dennison, Neighbourhood Integration Manager

Restricted Reports

Is this report restricted? **Yes** ☐ **No** ☑

Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.

Insert number ☐

1. Information relating to any individual
2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual
3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information)
4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter
5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained
6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction
7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime

If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?

After Committee Decision	☐
After Council Decision	☐
Sometime in the future	☐
Never	☐

Call-in

Is the decision eligible for Call-in? **Yes** ☑ **No** ☐

1.0	**Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues**
1.1	To request approval for 4 nominees to attend the Pride of Place Awards Ceremony in Dublin Convention Centre, Saturday 24th October 2026.
2.0	**Recommendation**
2.1	Members are asked to: • Approve attendance of the following at the Pride of Place Awards Ceremony in Dublin on 24th October 2026 1. People and Communities Committee Chair or nominee 2. People and Communities Committee Vice Chair or nominee 3. Director or nominee 4. Relevant Council Officer • Note that the Chief's Executive's Office has received separate invitations to attend.
3.0	**Main Report**
3.1	IPB Pride of Place, in association with Co-operation Ireland, is an all-island competition that acknowledges the work that communities are doing all over the island of Ireland. The competition focus is about people coming together to shape, change and improve daily lives in their communities. It has been in existence since 2003. Members will recall that at the April Committee meeting, Council approved 5 nominations to the IPB Pride of Place 2026 Awards. These nominations were as follows: • Urban Neighbourhood Over 3,000: Glencairn Community Project • Climate Action and Biodiversity: Connswater Community Greenway • Community Youth Initiative: Lagmore Youth Project • Community Wellbeing Initiative: North Belfast Care Zone • Creative Communities: Belfast South Arts and Digital Hub Each nominated group receives 2 invitations to attend the Award Ceremony and Belfast City Council has been allocated a further 4 invitations. Members are asked to approve the allocation of these 4 invitations as: 1. People and Communities Committee Chair or nominee 2. People and Communities Committee Vice Chair or nominee 3. Director or nominee 4. Relevant Council Officer Members should also note that the Chief Executive Office has received a separate invitation with an additional 2 tickets.

	Members may wish to note that the judging process for the Belfast nominations has been scheduled for June and July 2026. **Financial and Resource Implications** Members have agreed a budget allocation of up to £10,000 to cover nominations to the awards and cover attendance of nominees and relevant Members and Officers at the Awards Ceremony. Costs will be covered from existing budgets. Members are asked to note that the timing of the Awards Ceremony coincides with the Dublin City Marathon and as such, this may impact on the sourcing of appropriate accommodation. Early approval for the allocation of the 4 nominees will allow the booking process to begin in order to minimise costs. **Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment** None Required
4.0	**Appendices - Documents Attached**
4.1	None

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PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

Belfast City Council

Subject:	Framework for supporting sports clubs and individuals traveling for events outside NI
Date:	9 June 2026
Reporting Officer:	Jim Girvan Director of Neighbourhood Services
Contact Officer:	Claire Moraghan, Leisure Development Manager

Restricted Reports

Is this report restricted? **Yes** ☐ **No** ☒ x

Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.

Insert number ☐

1. Information relating to any individual
2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual
3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information)
4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter
5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained
6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction
7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime

If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?

After Committee Decision	☐
After Council Decision	☐
Sometime in the future	☐
Never	☐

Call-in

Is the decision eligible for Call-in? **Yes** ☐ **No** ☐

1.0	**Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues**
1.1	This paper provides a framework funding proposal to support Belfast sports teams and individuals traveling outside Northern Ireland to compete in recognised sporting events where qualification or Governing Body selection has taken place.
2.0	**Recommendation**
2.1	Members are asked to: - Approve the eligibility criteria for funding traveling teams outside NI - Approve maximum funding allocation per team under delegated authority to £5,000 - Approve increasing funding calls for Individual athletes to four times per year under delegated authority - Authorise officers to work up an application process in line with council funding procedures
3.0	**Main Report**
3.1	**Background Information** During the rate setting process in 2026, Members agreed to allocate funds of £100,000 to support Belfast sports teams/clubs traveling to competitive events outside of Belfast. Members instructed officers to draw up a framework for a funding allocation model which would open 4 times per year. This would be a standalone funding stream in addition to the current Support for Sport grant process managed under CGU that allocates Small (£1500), Large (£5000) and Hospitality (up to £3000).
3.2	Members will be aware that since a review of Support for Sport in 2012 an allocation of £15,000 is awarded to talented athletes annually under delegated authority. An individual can apply for a maximum of £1000 for costs associated with travel to Governing Body approved competitions and representative squad training outside NI. Currently Individual grants are applied for on behalf of the athlete by the Sport's Governing Body (GB) and managed by CGU. The annual fund is usually allocated fully at Tranche One. This results in many athletes missing out on support due to smaller GB's not having the capacity to apply and/or the notification of selection is late, and application deadlines are missed. Opening the application process to four times per year would increase funding for athletes from minority sports and allow officers to support more applications from women and girls and disability athletes. It is anticipated the funding would be split equally between the 4 financial quarters with an option to roll over any underspend into the next quarter.
3.3	**Team Travel**

3.4	More recently officers have received regular requests for support towards sports teams travelling in a representative capacity outside NI. Council does not have a currently fund travel for sports clubs. Research conducted with neighbouring council's demonstrates a lack of a consistent approach with only four council's offering specific club travel grants however the majority offer individual grants where members of team sports can apply as an individual. Table 1. Council areas providing team travel support The fund will open four times per year for both individual and team travel which will maximise both the range of sports and competitions throughout the seasons.

Council area	Max Amount	Criteria
Antrim & N'Abbey	£1500	Exceptional Team Competitions
ABC Council	£2000	Representative events -must Cost £4K+ to receive max amount
Derry & Strabane	£1600	Must qualify for event
Ards & North Down	£500	Must be representative competitions

4.0	
4.1	**<u>Financial and Resource Implications</u>** The Leisure Development Unit would manage the application and verification process in line with good practise and procedures. Leisure Development Unit has the financial resources to cover the cost of the initiative.
5.0	
5.1	**<u>Equality or Good Relations Implications /Rural Needs Assessment</u>** There are no Equality or Good Relations Implications /Rural Needs Assessments associated with this report.
6.0	**Appendices - Documents Attached or None**
	Appendix 1- Travel for Sports Events Framework

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Appendix One

Travel for Sports Events Framework

Purpose

The Belfast Competitive Travel Support Grant aims to assist Belfast-based sports clubs and individuals with the costs of travelling outside Belfast to compete in officially sanctioned Governing Body events where athletes or teams have qualified through a recognised selection or qualification process.

The scheme aims to support sporting excellence and reduce financial barriers to participation in higher-level competition.

The fund is a contribution towards travel costs and should not be expected to meet the full cost of participation.

Funding Available

- Maximum grant award per Team: £5,000
- Maximum grant award per Individual: £1,000
- Applications will open four times annually:
- Applications will be assessed competitively against available budget.
- Funding may cover up to 75% of eligible travel costs, with clubs/individuals expected to demonstrate a contribution from their own resources or other funding sources.

Eligibility

Applicants must:

1. Be a properly constituted sports club based within Belfast.
2. Individual applicants must be a Belfast resident or a member of a recognised Belfast sports club.
3. Be affiliated to the relevant recognised National Governing Body (NGB) for their sport.
4. Have a bank account in the name of the club (Team Application)
5. Have appropriate safeguarding, equality and insurance policies in place.
6. Be up to date with any monitoring requirements from previous grant awards.

Eligible Events

Funding will only be available for participation in:

- NGB-approved competitions, championships, or representative events taking place outside Northern Ireland.
- Events where the athlete, team or club has;
    - Qualified through a recognised competition structure; or
    - Been formally selected by the Governing Body.

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The following will not be eligible:

- Open-entry competitions where participants can self-select to enter.
- Training camps.
- Friendly matches.
- Exhibition events.
- Tours or development trips.
- Events not recognised by the relevant Governing Body.

Eligible Costs

Funding may be used towards:

- Transport costs (air, rail, ferry, coach or minibus hire).
- Accommodation.
- Event-related travel within the host location.
- Essential equipment transportation costs.
- Entry fees where these are required by the Governing Body event.

All expenditure must represent value for money.

Ineligible Costs

Funding cannot be used for:

- Salaries, coaching fees
- Purchase of equipment.
- Kit or clothing.
- Hospitality or entertainment.
- Alcohol.
- Fines or penalties.
- General club operating costs.
- Costs already fully funded from another public source.

Assessment Criteria

Applications will be assessed against the following:

1. Level of Competition
2. Financial Need
3. Impact
4. Governance and Delivery

Retrospective Applications

Applications should normally be submitted before travel takes place.

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Retrospective applications will only be considered where:

- A team, athlete or official received a late qualification, selection or call-up after the relevant funding round deadline; and
- The application is submitted within 4 weeks of the event taking place.

Retrospective applications will not be accepted where clubs/individuals had a reasonable opportunity to apply in advance.

Evidence Required

Applicants must provide:

- Confirmation of qualification or official selection from the Governing Body.
- Event details and dates.
- Travel itinerary.
- Breakdown of costs.
- Evidence of club contribution and any other funding secured.
- Participant numbers.
- Club insurance and bank details (if not already held).

Conditions of Award

Successful applicants must:

- Use the funding solely for approved purposes.
- Retain receipts and supporting documentation.
- Submit a short monitoring report within 4 weeks of the event.
- Acknowledge support from the BCC where appropriate.
- Repay any unspent or ineligible expenditure if requested.

Budget Priority

Where applications exceed the available budget, priority may be given to:

1. First-time applicants.
2. Junior and youth teams.
3. Athletes/Teams competing at international championship level.
4. Clubs/Individuals demonstrating the greatest financial need.
5. Applications involving multiple Belfast participants.

A maximum of £5,000 (Team) and £1000 (Individual) will be awarded in one financial year.

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Belfast City Council

PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

Party political use of Community Centres and Bowling Pavilions

Subject:	Party political use of Community Centres and Bowling Pavilions
Date:	9th June 2026
Reporting Officer:	Jim Girvan, Director of Neighbourhood Services
Contact Officer:	Margaret Higgins, Lead Officer, Neighbourhood Services Yvonne Coyle, Community Services Unit Manager

Restricted Reports

Is this report restricted? **Yes** [ ] **No** [x]

Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.

Insert number [ ]

1. Information relating to any individual
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3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information)
4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter
5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained
6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction
7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime

If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?

After Committee Decision	[ ]
After Council Decision	[ ]
Sometime in the future	[ ]
Never	[ ]

Call-in

Is the decision eligible for Call-in? **Yes** [x] **No** [ ]

1.0	**Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues**
1.1	To advise members of a change to the facility conditions of hire for Council operated community centres and seek Committee agreement on the wording that will be used in respect of this. This change relates to party political use, which would be permitted on a restricted basis.
2.0	**Recommendation**
2.1	Members are asked to note the contents of the report and agree the change in facility conditions of hire wording that will enable use by political parties on a restricted basis.
3.0	**Main Report**
3.1	**Background** Elected members recently requested that officers consider a change to the facilities conditions of hire in community centres and bowling pavilions to enable party political use. City & Neighbourhood Services Officers have engaged with Legal Services to develop a form of words that would permit party political use on a restricted basis and provide clarity for staff when taking bookings.
3.2	Party Political activity is currently restricted within Council operated community centres through the following Condition of Hire. *'that the facility will only be used for the purpose stated in the application and shall not be used for party political purposes'.*
3.3	The clause below would enable restricted use by political parties; *That if the Facilities forms part of the Council's Community Centres, the Hirer agrees that the Facilities will only be used for the purpose stated in the Application and shall not be used for any Party Political Activities as defined in clause 1.11 however,* ***Community Centres can be used by political parties for public good i.e. for constituency/advisory clinics, or community engagement purposes, where the activity does not involve campaigning, fundraising, or promotion of a political party or its policies, and is intended to provide a service or information to members of the public. Political Parties will not be able to book a venue during Purdah Period.*** ***For the purposes of these terms and conditions, reference to Purdah Period includes reference to Periods of Heightened Political Sensitivity which is observed by the Council in relation to local elections.***
3.4	Members should note that Party Political Activities are currently permitted in other Council facilities such as Leisure Centres and Bowling pavilions without any restrictions.

	Members are asked to consider whether they wish to amend the existing Conditions of Hire for Bowling Pavilions to ensure that they are consistent with other spaces owned and operated by the Council.
3.5	Removal of the restriction and use of Council Community Centres will be subject to compliance with booking procedures and current conditions of hire. These include: • All requests for use of community centres are subject to availability and compliance with conditions of hire and pricing policy. • Booking documentation will outline specific purpose of use and may require risk assessments and event management plans. • All requests for use must comply with the Council's 'Good & Harmonious' policy/procedures.
3.6	C&NS has responsibility for 27 directly managed community centres, a full list of community centres can be found here; Community centres. Any change to the Conditions of Hire agreed by committee will come into effect for bookings from 01 September 2026 onwards.
4.0	**Financial and Resource Implications**
4.1	All activity outlined in the report can be delivered within existing resources. City & Neighbourhood Services will draft detailed guidance for staff following committee's decision.
5.0	**Equality or Good Relations Implications /Rural Needs Assessment**
5.1	A screening of this proposed amendment has been commenced. If the decision is screened in, a further report will be brought to Committee to reconsider this decision in advance of the proposed commencement date of 01 September. A full review of the terms and conditions is underway and they will be screened for any equality or good relations impacts.
6.0	**Appendices - Documents Attached or None**
6.1	N/A

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PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

Belfast City Council

Subject:	Off Street Car Park Update
Date:	9 June 2026
Reporting Officer:	David Bone, City Protection Manager
Contact Officer:	Gavin Bell, Off Street Parking Manager

Restricted Reports

Is this report restricted? **Yes** ☐ **No** ☑

Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.

Insert number ☐

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If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?

After Committee Decision	☐
After Council Decision	☐
Sometime in the future	☐
Never	☐

Call-in

Is the decision eligible for Call-in? **Yes** ☐ **No** ☐

1.0	**Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues**
1.1	The purpose of this report is to update Committee further to the last update report on Off Street Car Parking tabled at People & Communities in January 2026.
1.2	Committee are reminded that the January 2026 report detailed the following key proposed changes within the draft Belfast Off Street Car Parking Order. • Review of Blue Bade parking concessions • Inclusion of four car parks which are not subject to the current Off-Street Parking (NI) Order 2000. • Removal of two car parks from the Off-Street Parking (NI) Order 2000, namely Bankmore Street and Frederick Street which are not within Council's estate. • Inclusion of a mechanism to allow for the temporary closure of car parks.
1.3	The draft Belfast Off Street Parking Order was approved by People and Communities Committee in October 2023 and full Council in November 2023.
1.4	This report details the finding from the consultation exercise completed from 20 February to 18 May, and a recommendation to publish a Notice of Intention for the four car parks (Appendix 1).
2.0	**Recommendation**
2.1	Members are asked to consider the following recommendations • Agree to advertise the four car parks currently outside of the Off-Street Parking Order 2000 via a Notice of Intention. These car parks are Shaw's Bridge, Stranmillis, Slievegullion and Parkgate Avenue. • Note the consultation response update contained within this report. • Note that a further update report will be brought back to Committee after the notification period has concluded.
3.0	**Main Report**
3.1	**Background** The draft Belfast Off-Street Parking Order has been developed to provide a revised framework for the management and operation of Council owned off-street car parks.
3.2	The main elements of the draft Belfast Off-Street Parking Order will remain unchanged from the current legislation which is place.

3.3	Committee is recommended to agree publishing a Notice of Intention to include four existing public car parks into the order. The four car parks are; • Shaw's Bridge • Stranmillis • Slievegallion • Parkgate Avenue
3.4	Shaw's Bridge and Parkgate Avenue car parks transferred from the DfI in 2015 but are not included in the current legislation. Stranmillis and Slievegallion were both BCC assets prior to off street car parks transferring from DfI.
3.5	Subject to Committee agreement the Notice of Intention (Appendix 1) will be published in three papers and in the Belfast Gazette. Signage will also be placed in all four car parks. A further update report will be brought back to Committee for consideration after the notification period.
3.6	As advised in the update report to Committee in January 2026 a public consultation exercise has been undertaken from 20 February 10 to 18 May seeking views on several other proposals, including: • The introduction of arrangements to allow for the temporary closure of car parks; • The introduction of mechanisms to allow for temporary alternative uses of car parks; • Proposed provisions relating to Blue Badge holders; and • General comments on the designation and operation of off-street car parks.
3.7	A total of 39 responses were received during the consultation period. Members can avail of a copy of the full consultation results on request.
3.8	**Summary of Consultation Findings:** Overall, the responses reflect a broad range of views, with no clear consensus across all proposals. While there is recognition of the need for flexibility in how car parks are managed, respondents raised several points, particularly in relation to accessibility, cost and availability.
3.9	**Temporary Closure of Car Parks** There is support for the introduction of a process to facilitate the temporary closure of car parks. Respondents indicated that such measures could be acceptable where:

	• Adequate advance notice is provided; • Clear signage and communication are in place; and • Alternative arrangements are considered.
3.10	However, several concerns were raised, including: • Reduced availability of parking spaces; • Increased pressure on on-street parking provision; and • Potential impacts on residents and city centre access. Several respondents also requested that any closures should be subject to defined time limits or review mechanisms.
3.11	**Temporary Alternative Use of Car Parks** There is support for enabling temporary alternative uses of car parks, particularly where this allows better utilisation of underused space. Positive feedback highlighted opportunities for: • Community events and markets; and • Increased flexibility in the use of Council assets.
3.12	However, respondents stressed that: • Such uses should not take place where there is significant demand for parking; • Careful consideration must be given to location and timing; and • Clear communication is essential to minimise disruption.
3.13	**Blue Badge Proposals** Feedback in relation to Blue Badge provisions was mixed.
3.14	***Charging for Off-Street Parking*** *Blue Badge holders* Views were divided between: • Those opposed to charging, who highlighted: o Additional financial pressures on disabled users; and o Limited alternative travel options; • Those in favour, who noted: o That Blue Badge entitlement is not means-tested; and o The need for consistency with private sector provision.
3.15	***Additional Free Parking Time*** There was general support for providing an additional period of free parking time for Blue Badge holders.

	Respondents noted that: • Additional time is often required due to mobility and accessibility needs; and • Such a provision would improve accessibility and reduce pressure on users.
3.16	**Accessibility Considerations** Accessibility was a key theme across many responses. Issues raised included: • Insufficient provision of disabled parking spaces; • Difficulties accessing certain car parks; and • Misuse of designated disabled bays.
3.17	Suggestions included: • Increasing the number of accessible parking spaces; • Improving enforcement; and • Enhancing the design and layout of facilities.
3.18	**Parking Charges and Affordability** A significant proportion of respondents raised concerns regarding the cost of parking. These concerns included: • Perceptions that parking charges are too high; • The potential impact on city centre footfall and economic activity; and • Comparisons with public transport costs and alternative provisions.
3.19	**Wider Strategic Issues** Although outside the scope of the Order, respondents frequently referenced broader issues, including: • The relationship between parking policy and public transport; • The need for a balanced approach to city centre access; and • The importance of integrating parking policy with wider regeneration and transport objectives.
3.20	**Communication and Implementation** A consistent theme across responses was the importance of effective communication. Respondents highlighted the need for: • Clear and timely information on any proposed changes; • Adequate signage; and • Transparency in decision-making processes.

3.21	**Next Steps** Subject to Committee agreement it is recommended to advertise the intention to include the four car parks within the draft Belfast Off Street Parking Order. Following this advertisement a report will be brought back to committee to examine the responses received during the notification period and seek enactment. Enactment would assist in managing the parking behaviours occurring in these car parks.
4.0	**Financial and Resource Implications** There are no direct financial implications arising from this report at this stage. Any financial implications associated with the implementation of the Order will be brought back to Committee in due course.
5.0	**Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment** The consultation responses highlight potential considerations to be made to blue badge bay design. These issues will be considered further as part of the development and implementation of the Order.
4.0	**Appendices**
4.1	Appendix 1 - Notice of Intention

Appendix 1

Belfast Off - Street Parking (Public Car Parks) Order 2026

Notice is hereby given that the Belfast City Council in the exercise of the powers conferred through (a) Articles 10, 13, 14(3) and 26(1) of the Road Traffic Regulation (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 (b) and Off-street Parking (Functions of District Councils) Act (Northern Ireland) 2015 proposes to make an Order entitled The Belfast Off - Street Parking (Public Car Parks) Order 2026.

The Off-Street Parking (Belfast) Order 2026 will:

- Reproduce provisions of previous orders
- Include 4 existing public car parks (Schedule 1)
- Introduce concession for Blue Badge parking (Article 19)
- Introduce provision for the suspension of car parking places for works or events to be undertaken (Article 32)

The Order will affect the following Off-Street Car Parks:

- Parkgate Avenue
- Shaw's Bridge
- Slieve Gallion
- Stranmillis

Full details are contained in the draft Order and along with the associated maps and current and existing charges, may be inspected free of charge during office hours within the period below at Belfast City Council, Cecil Ward Building, 4-10 Linenhall Street, Belfast, BT2 8DP or viewed online at www.belfastcity.gov.uk/tourism-venues/carparking/carparks.aspx .

The draft Order and along with the associated maps and current and existing charges may also be inspected free of charge at the following locations during office hours:

Cecil Ward Building, 4-10 Linenhall Street, Belfast, BT2 8DP

Any person may, within a period of 28 days from the date of publication of this notice, object or make other representations to the proposals in writing, stating the grounds on which the representation or objection is being made, to, the Off Street Parking Unit at Belfast City Council, Cecil Ward Building, 4-10 Linenhall Street, Belfast, BT2 8DP. Information you provide, including personal information, could be published or disclosed under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) or the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIR). For further details on confidentiality, the FOIA and EIR please refer to www.ico.org.uk

Dated this day

Friday xx xxxx 2026

David Sales

Strategic Director of City and Neighbourhood Services

City and Neighbourhood Services Department

Belfast City Council

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PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

Belfast City Council

Subject:	RAPID Bin – Ormeau Park
Date:	Tuesday 9th June 2026
Reporting Officer:	Jim Girvan – Operational Director, City and Neighbourhood Services
Contact Officer:	Pól Hamilton – Lead Officer, Community Safety Katharine McCrum – Safer City Coordinator

Restricted Reports

Is this report restricted? **Yes** [ ] **No** [X]

Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.

Insert number [ ]

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If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?

After Committee Decision	[ ]
After Council Decision	[ ]
Sometime in the future	[ ]
Never	[ ]

Call-in

Is the decision eligible for Call-in? **Yes** [X] **No** [ ]

1.0	**Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues**
1.1	The purpose of the following report is to explore the possibility of the placement of the RAPID drugs disposal bin on Belfast City Council land, in the vicinity of Ormeau Park.
2.0	**Recommendation**
2.1	Members to note contents of the report and approve the placement of a RAPID bin in the vicinity of Ormeau Park.
3.0	**Main Report**
	<u>Background and Context</u>
3.1	The RAPID initiative (Remove All Prescription and Illegal Drugs) has been in place since 2010 to help remove illegal and prescription drugs from our streets by providing drug disposal bins within communities.
3.2	RAPID has three aims: • Removal of prescription, illegal and new psychoactive substances (often referred to as 'legal highs' and now illegal following the introduction of the Psychoactive Substances Act in May 2016) from communities. • Provision of information and support to individuals, families, local businesses and community organisations to raise awareness of the effects and risks of using/misusing illegal and/or prescription drugs. • Bringing together community and statutory agencies, local businesses and the general public under the RAPID initiative to work towards making their local community a safer place to live
3.3	The Public Health Agency, PSNI, local Drug and Alcohol Coordination Teams (DACTs) Connections Teams and PCSPs are responsible for identifying areas that might be suitable for RAPID bins.
3.4	Officers within the Community Safety unit have been working with the Belfast Drug and Alcohol Coordination Team (BDACT) on several initiatives including the RAPID scheme.
3.5	BDACT Connections have indicated that there currently exists a gap in relation to a RAPID bin in the Ormeau area and were keen to explore options alongside Belfast City Council for a suitable location within the vicinity of Ormeau Park.
3.6	The current provision of RAPID bins within Belfast are all placed indoors, typically with a shopping centre, GP surgery or community facility. The success of a RAPID bin i.e. those with the greatest disposals recorded, are locations where there is heavy footfall, where members of the public can pass through and dispose of any drugs within a matter of seconds.
3.7	PSNI and BDACT staff empty the bins regularly and record the types and quantities of drugs found before they are destroyed. Whilst most drugs disposed of are prescription medication, illicit substances are also itemised and disposed of, and this scheme limits the opportunities for the misuse of both illicit and prescription medication through safe disposal.
3.8	No personal details are collected but substances may be tested for identification or toxicity. At the moment, Belfast has some very successful bins within the Kennedy Centre and Tesco stores at Ballygomartin, City Side and Knocknagoney.

3.9	Although Belfast does not have any outdoor bins currently, several locations outside of Belfast have utilised bins in outdoor locations with great success, one of the most successful outdoor bins is situated with a car park in Newry, with no issues reported.
3.10	Initial engagement with BDACT Connections colleagues suggests that the preferred location, deemed most likely to be successful would be in the vicinity of the entrance to Ormeau Park (Ormeau Road) facing the Ormeau Library. Other potential locations to be considered would include the alternative entrance on Ormeau Road (opposite Candahar Street) or Ormeau Recycling Centre (off Park Road)
3.11	Officers will carry out further engagements with BDACT, Police, Elected members within the DEA and community groups within the locality prior to the installation of the RAPID bin.
3.12	<u>Financial & Resource Implications</u> No costs to Council, all costs will be covered by PHA and BDACT.
3.13	<u>Equality or Good Relations Implications /Rural Needs Assessments</u> There are no good relations or rural needs impacts associated with this report.
4.0	**Appendices - Documents Attached**
4.1	None

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PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

Belfast City Council

Subject:	Update on The Tobacco and Vapes Act 2026
Date:	9 June 2026
Reporting Officer:	Siobhan Toland, Director of City Services
Contact Officer:	David Cuthbert, City Protection Manager Diane Herron, Senior Environmental Health Officer

Restricted Reports

Is this report restricted? **Yes** [ ] **No** [x]

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If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?

After Committee Decision	[ ]
After Council Decision	[ ]
Sometime in the future	[ ]
Never	[ ]

Call-in

Is the decision eligible for Call-in? **Yes** [X] **No** [ ]

1.0	**Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues**
1.1	To update the Committee on the enactment of the Tobacco and Vapes Act (T&V Act) which received Royal Assent on 29 April 2026, and to outline the key provisions of the legislation and its implementation arrangements in Northern Ireland.
1.2	The T&V Act represents a significant public health intervention and introduces wide-ranging measures aimed at reducing tobacco and nicotine-related harm, particularly among children and young people.
1.3	Smoking remains the leading cause of preventable illness and premature death in Northern Ireland, accounting for over 2,000 deaths annually. It is also a major driver of health inequalities, with lung cancer rates in the most deprived areas two and a half times higher than in the least deprived communities. The rise in vaping among young people has also been identified as a significant concern. In Northern Ireland, 15% of all 11–18 year olds vape, with evidence suggesting a gateway effect between vaping and subsequent cigarette use.
1.4	The T&V Act supports the long-term vision of the Ten-Year Tobacco Control Strategy for Northern Ireland, which aims to create a tobacco-free society. Following enactment of the legislation, the Department of Health will develop a successor strategy, with an expanded scope to include vapes and other nicotine products.
2.0	**Recommendation**
2.1	It is recommended that Members note the update provided on the Tobacco and Vapes Act and the key provisions and implementation arrangements outlined in this report.
3.0	**Main Report**
	<u>Key Issues</u>
3.1	The T&V Act represents a significant step forward in protecting public health, reducing health inequalities and preventing nicotine addiction among future generations.
3.2	The T&V Act introduces a smoke-free generation by making it illegal to sell tobacco products, herbal smoking products or cigarette papers to anyone born on or after 1 January 2009, with this provision taking effect from 1 January 2027. Adults who smoke can still legally purchase tobacco and smoking cessation services will be available to those who wish to quit.
3.3	From 29 October 2026, it will also be illegal to sell non-nicotine vapes and other nicotine containing products to under 18s. There will also be a ban on proxy purchasing of vaping and nicotine products on behalf of under 18s.
3.4	The tobacco vending machine ban will also be extended to include cigarette papers, vapes and other nicotine products, along with the introduction of a ban on the free distribution and discounting of vapes and nicotine products.
3.5	On 29th October 2026, the Northern Ireland Tobacco Register will also be extended to include businesses selling vapes and other nicotine containing products.
3.6	By way of background information for Members, since 2016 under The Tobacco Retailers Act (Northern Ireland) 2014, anyone running a tobacco business in Northern Ireland is required to register with the NI Tobacco Register. The Register is accessible to the public and anyone can easily find registered premises in their area. It is an offence not to register with a potential

	penalty of a £500 Fixed Penalty Notice. The Minister of Health has indicated that the start date for enforcement of these extended requirements covering retailers selling vapes and nicotine containing products is 1st March 2027.
3.7	Belfast City Council are the current Registration Authority for the Tobacco Register of Northern Ireland and are funded to maintain and manage the Register on behalf of the Department for Health. The Council will also be responsible for the set-up and implementation of the new extended Register from 29 October 2026, and additional funding is being provided by the Department of Health for this work. In the longer term, additional retail licensing provisions may be introduced by the Department to further strengthen regulation in this area.
3.8	The Public Health Agency continues to commission stop smoking services across Northern Ireland through community pharmacies, GP practices and local Health and Social Care Trusts. In 2024/25, a total of 9,587 people were reported to have set a quit date through PHA-funded stop smoking services. Further information and local support are available at: https://www.stopsmokingni.info
3.9	Further information on the Tobacco and Vapes Act including the implementation arrangements for each phase can be accessed using the link below: https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/tobacco-and-vapes-bill-documents
3.10	Representatives from Councils, including Belfast City Council, are currently working with the Department of Health and Public Health Agency through a Tobacco and Vapes Joint Implementation Group to prepare for the implementation of the phases of the Act and associated Regulations.
	Financial and Resource Implications
3.11	The Council receives funding from the Public Health Agency to cover the cost of maintaining and managing the Tobacco Register NI and funding for two full-time Tobacco Control Officers. For 2025/26 this funding amounted to £149,056. The Tobacco Control Officers currently enforce legislation with regards to underage sales and carry out advisory and compliance visits to tobacco retailers. Any additional work regarding the Council's regulatory functions in this field are currently covered within existing service budgets.
3.12	**Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment** Equality and rural need screenings have been undertaken by the Department of Health in advance of introducing the legislation. The legislation is expected to have a positive impact on equality and health outcomes, particularly for children and young people and those living in areas of greater deprivation.
	Appendices None

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PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

Belfast City Council

Subject:	Request for the use Friars Bush Cemetery
Date:	9 June 2026
Reporting Officer:	David Sales, Strategic Director of City and Neighbourhood Services.
Contact Officer:	Siobhan Toland, Director of City Services

Restricted Reports

Is this report restricted? **Yes** [ ] **No** [x]

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If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?

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After Council Decision	[ ]
Sometime in the future	[ ]
Never	[ ]

Call-in

Is the decision eligible for Call-in? **Yes** [x] **No** [ ]

1.0	**Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues**
1.1	At People and Communities in May the Committee agreed to defer consideration of the recommendations presented for the allocation of days for the delivery of tours at Friar's Bush Burial Ground to enable further discussions to be undertaken with the two tour providers concerned. The purpose of this report is to provide a further update to Committee following recent engagement with the tour providers below at Friars Bush. • Friends of Friars Bush – Guided Tours of Friar's Bush Graveyard • Cairde na Cille CIC – Guided Tours of Friar's Bush Graveyard
2.0	**Recommendation**
2.1	The Committee is asked to grant authority to the applicants for the proposed events on the dates noted; subject to the completion of the appropriate event management plans and satisfactory terms being agreed by the Director of City & Neighbourhood Services and on the condition that the Event Organisers: I. resolves all operational issues to the Council's satisfaction; II. meets all statutory requirements including Public Liability Insurance cover, Health and Safety, and licensing responsibilities; and III. shall consult with adjoining public bodies and local communities as necessary.
2.2	Where appropriate a fee will be negotiated which recognises the costs to Council, minimises negative impact on the immediate area and takes account of the potential wider benefit to the city economy, in conjunction with the Councils Commercial Manager.
2.3	Please note that the above recommendations are taken as a pre-policy position in advance of the Council agreeing a more structured framework and policy for 'Events', which is currently being taken forward in conjunction with the Councils Commercial team.
3.0	**Main Report**
3.1	**<u>Key Issues</u>**
3.2	Following the request from People & Communities Committee to defer the recommendations in the May 2026 report further engagement has taken place with both interested tour providers on their respective planned programmes of activities at Friars Bush graveyard over the coming months. On review it is necessary for operational reasons to maintain separate days access for the current tour providers.

3.3	If agreed, the event organiser will be required in advance of the event to submit an event management plan for approval by the Council and all relevant statutory bodies. This will include an assessment of how the event will impact upon the surrounding area and measures to mitigate these impacts.
3.4	**<u>'Friends of Friars Bush' - Guided Tours of Friar's Bush Graveyard</u>** Belfast Council has received a request from 'Friends of Friars Bush', who are an informal collective of independent professional tour guides. 'Friends of Friar's Bush' are proposing to host a series of tours at Friar's Bush Graveyard from May 2026 to April 2027.
3.5	This collective of local independent guides have extensive knowledge of Friar's Bush and have been carrying out tours at the site for several years. A standard tour will last 1.15 hours and is scripted, agreed and shared between all guides. The context of the tour is an impartial factual tour, suitable for all audiences and uses primary historical sources as much as possible.
3.6	Following a review by Bereavement Services, Committee approval is sought for these ongoing tours subject to compliance with requirements of use set out by Council. This approval is annual and is subject to change depending on operational requirements. If approved the 'Friends of Friar's Bush' will have access on the dates below.
3.7	Following recent engagement this collective of local independent guides proposes to provide approximately eighty tours until 30th September 2026 with an average of 10 people per tour attending. This proposed offering will include provision linked to wider events taking place in the City over the summer months.
3.8	**The Key Dates for the request are:** **Main Event – Each Saturday, Monday, Wednesday and Friday for a period of 1 year, times to be agreed in advance with Bereavement Services.**
3.9	**<u>Cairde na Cille CIC – Guided Tours of Friars Bush Graveyard</u>** Council has received a request from Cairde na Cille CIC to host regular tours in Friar's Bush Graveyard. The purpose of the tours is to promote community relations, share heritage and to animate built and open spaces in Belfast.

3.10	Cairde na Cille CIC consists of local guides with extensive knowledge of Friar's Bush. The group provide some free events for economically deprived communities and have been carrying out tours at the site for several years.
3.11	Following a recent review by Bereavement Services, Committee approval is sought for these ongoing tours subject to compliance with requirements of use set out by Council. This approval is annual and is subject to change depending on operational requirements. If approved the 'Cairde na Cille CIC' will have access on dates below.
3.12	As well as providing guided tours this group also complete volunteering efforts within Friars Bush graveyard. Following recent engagement Council Officers will continue to work with the group to ensure the heritage and biodiversity of the site is maintained.
3.13	**The Key Dates for the request are:** **Main Event – Each Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday for a period of 1 year, times to be agreed in advance by Bereavement Services.**
3.14	**Financial and Resource Implications** There are no known implications.
3.15	**Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment** There are no known implications
4.0	**Appendices**
	None

PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

Belfast City Council

Subject:	Request for the use of Parks for 2026 Events
Date:	9th June 2026
Reporting Officer:	David Sales, Strategic Director of City and Neighbourhood Services.
Contact Officer:	Stephen Leonard, Director Resources Fleet Open Spaces & Streetscene

Restricted Reports

Is this report restricted? **Yes** [ ] **No** [x]

Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.

Insert number [ ]

1. Information relating to any individual.
2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual.
3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information)
4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter
5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained.
6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction.
7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime

If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?

After Committee Decision	[ ]
After Council Decision	[ ]
Sometime in the future	[ ]
Never	[ ]

Call-in

Is the decision eligible for Call-in? **Yes** [x] **No** [ ]

1.0	**Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues**
1.1	The Committee is asked to note that Council has received several requests from event organisers to host events across several city park locations in 2026 and these include. • Outdoor Church Service – Waterworks Park, Woodvale Park & Marrowbone • Cedar Foundation – Ormeau Park
2.0	**Recommendation**
2.1	The Committee is asked to grant authority to the applicants for the proposed events on the dates noted; subject to the completion of the appropriate event management plans and satisfactory terms being agreed by the Director of City & Neighbourhood Services and on the condition that the Event Organisers:
2.2	I. resolves all operational issues to the Council's satisfaction; II. meets all statutory requirements including Public Liability Insurance cover, Health and Safety, and licensing responsibilities; and III. shall consult with adjoining public bodies and local communities as necessary.
2.3	Where appropriate a fee will be negotiated which recognises the costs to Council, minimises negative impact on the immediate area and takes account of the potential wider benefit to the city economy, in conjunction with the Councils Commercial Manager.
2.4	Please note that the above recommendations are taken as a pre-policy position in advance of the Council agreeing a more structured framework and policy for 'Events', which is currently being taken forward in conjunction with the Councils Commercial team.
3.0	**Main Report**
3.1	**<u>Key Issues</u>** If agreed, the event organiser will be required in advance of the event to submit an event management plan for approval by the Council and all relevant statutory bodies. This will include an assessment of how the event will impact upon the surrounding area and measures to mitigate these impacts.
3.2	

	Outdoor Church Service – Waterworks 5 July, Woodvale 23 July & Marrowbone 19 July 2026
	Belfast City Council has received a request from The Ark Church Belfast to host three separate outdoor services in Belfast parks during the month of July. The locations are Woodvale Park, Marrowbone Park & Waterworks. These services have previously taken place in 2022 & 2024 but had not taken place last year. The group wish to be granted permission to allow them to take place again this year.
3.3	The services are expected to attract around 200 attendees at each service. The service will include live songs of praise that will be played over speakers. They plan on having gazebos in place at each park to use as a cover in the event of bad weather
3.4	The purpose of their request is to be able to carry out their services outdoors in the hope that it will reach new people. Each event will have stewards at them to ensure no issues occur and the group will be providing their own bins to ensure all litter is removed from the site.
	The Key Dates are as follows:
3.5	**Waterworks Service 5 July 2026** Set-up- 6pm Service – 7pm-8.30pm De-Rig – 9pm **Woodvale Service 2026** Set-up- 6pm Service – 7pm-8.30pm De-Rig – 9pm **Marrowbone Service 2026** Set-up- 6pm Service – 7pm-8.30pm De-Rig – 9pm
	Cedar Foundation – Ormeau Park – Thursday 20 August 2026
3.6	Belfast City Council has received a request from the Cedar Foundation, a long-established charity supporting individuals living with disability, autism and brain injury, to host a one-day event at Ormeau Park part of the organisation's 85th anniversary celebrations.

	The event is designed as a family-friendly country fun day, bringing together Cedar service users, their families, Cedar staff, volunteers, and the wider community. The event will have carnival stalls, arts & crafts and live background music, with the main fundraising competition at the heart of the day. The event is designed to be accessible and enjoyable for everyone, celebrating what Cedar does every day. Families are at the centre of everything, with activities for all ages and abilities running throughout the day.
3.7	Tickets will be available to purchase online at £5 per person, with under 16s admitted free of charge. They have also requested permission to collect donations in buckets during the event. 100% of all fundraising proceeds will go directly to the Cedar Appeal Fund. Charity number - NIC10112.
3.8	**The Key dates for the request are:** Set up – 12pm on Thursday 20 August 2026 **Main Event – 11.00pm to 4.00pm on Thursday 20 August 2026** De-Rig – 7pm on Thursday 20 August 2026
3.9	**<u>Financial and Resource Implications</u>** There are no known implications.
3.10	**<u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u>** There are no known implications
4.0	**Appendices**
	None

PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

Belfast City Council

Subject:	**Dog Fouling Action Plan - Post Mounted Bins Pilot Update**
Date:	8th June 2026
Reporting Officer:	Stephen Leonard, Operational Director CNS
Contact Officer:	Edel Gowdy, Lead Officer OSS

Restricted Reports

Is this report restricted? **Yes** [ ] **No** [x]

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Insert number [ ]

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6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction.
7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime

If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?

After Committee Decision	[ ]
After Council Decision	[ ]
Sometime in the future	[ ]
Never	[ ]

Call-in

Is the decision eligible for Call-in? **Yes** [ ] **No** [X]

1.0	**Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues**
1.1	To provide Members with an update on the installation of post-mounted litter bins as part of the Council's Dog Fouling Action Plan, including progress since the May Committee meeting.
2.0	**Recommendation**
2.1	Members are asked to: 1. Note the update on installation progress for post-mounted litter bins.
3.0	**Main Report**
3.1	In May 2026, officers presented an update to the People and Communities Committee on the implementation of the Dog Fouling Action Plan, including the planned installation of post-mounted litter bins at identified hotspot locations. At that time, officers advised that several proposed sites were proving difficult to progress due to DfI lighting column restrictions, and limited mounting points. Members requested that a further update be brought back to Committee in June.
3.2	Since the May committee meeting , Officers have undertaken additional site assessments, and because of this work, have identified suitable lampposts within all proposed locations. At the time of writing at least one bin has been installed at each location, with the last one due to be installed in the next week. An additional two sites have been added (one following a member's request, and one as a replacement of a previous post mounted bin in former Castlereagh Council area). All sites listed in Appendix A.
3.3	In two instances, whilst attempting to install the post mounted litter bins officers received complaints from residents. In both cases, officers have been able to identify suitable alternative locations, and will continue to monitor their impact as part of the pilot. Should further complaints be received regarding the recently installed bins, officers will consider alternative locations and bin options, should this be required. Members should note that officers have meet with some opposition from residents when attempting to install standard litter bins in residential locations in the past.
3.4	In preparation for the lamp post mounted bin pilot, 20 bins were put on order in September 2025, and were delivered in October 2025.

3.5 In circumstances where a suitable lamppost cannot be used for mounting, officers have obtained indicative costs for installing separate posts to accommodate litter bins. Estimates outline the following:

Installation Type	Description	Estimated Subtotal (£)
Post in Grass	Includes squad hire for civils works, postcrete, topsoil reinstatement, and minor cultivation/fertilisation	**456.42**
Post in Bitmac	Includes squad hire for civils works, postcrete, tar reinstatement, and minor uplift	**603.10**

3.6 These figures represent average installation costs per unit, depending on surface type and reinstatement requirements. The higher cost for bitmac installations reflects the need for tar reinstatement and associated civils work.

3.7 Officers had undertaken benchmarking with other councils to understand their approach to post-mounted litter bins, particularly in relation to dog-fouling reduction. Feedback from neighbouring and comparator councils indicates that post-mounted bins are used in a targeted and limited manner, typically where:

- Footway width prevents installation of a standard freestanding bin
- Additional capacity is required near bus stops, park entrances or linear walking routes

3.8 Benchmarking confirms that deploying post-mounted bins selectively and where technically appropriate is consistent with wider practice. Other Councils emphasised the importance of public messaging such as “any bin will do” for dog waste, reinforcing that post-mounted bins are not a standalone solution but part of a mixed bin estate.

3.9 **Financial and Resource Implications**

Should a separate post mount be required for installation of further post mounted bins, and subject to DfI approval, the costs outlined in the table above would be incurred. The costs of this pilot has been met within existing budgets.

3.10 **Equality or Good Relations Implications /Rural Needs Assessment**

3.11	There are no Equality or Good Relations Implications /Rural Needs Assessments associated with this report. The costs for this pilot can be met from within existing budgets.
4	**Appendices**
4.1	**Appendix A:** Streets included in the post mounted bin pilot, as part of the dog fouling action plan.

Appendix A

Streets included in the post mounted bin pilot, as part of the dog fouling action plan, including two additional sites.

North	Whitewell Road
	Cavehill Road
	Oldpark Road

East	Orby Drive
	Belmont Road
	Clarawood Park
	Cregagh Road
	Beechgrove park

South	Ravenhill Road
	Farnham Street
	Cranmore area
	Ailesbury Drive

West	Clonard Street
	Lenadoon Avenue
	Rockvill Street
	Springfield Road

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Belfast City Council

PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES

AGENDA ITEM : PROPOSALS FOR DUAL LANGUAGE STREET SIGNS WHICH HAVE BEEN IDENTIFIED AS LONG STREETS

Subject:	**Proposals for dual language street signs which have been identified as long streets**
Date:	9th June 2026
Reporting Officer:	Kate Bentley, Director of Planning and Building Control
Contact Officer:	Ian Harper, Building Control Manager, ext. 2430 Heather Wylie, Property and Legal Coordinator, ext. 2464

Restricted Reports

Is this report restricted? **Yes** [ ] **No** [x]

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Insert number [ ]

1. Information relating to any individual
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7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime

If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?

After Committee Decision	[ ]
After Council Decision	[ ]
Sometime in the future	[ ]
Never	[ ]

Call-in

Yes [x] **No** [ ]

Is the decision eligible for Call-in?

1.0	**Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues**
1.1	To consider applications for the erection of dual language street signs for two existing streets within the city which have been designated as long streets in line with the policy.
2.0	**Recommendation**
2.1	1. Members are asked to consider the Dual Language Street Sign survey results for Donegall Park Avenue and Oldpark Road which have been identified as "long streets" in line with Policy and either: a) Agree that dual language streets signs with a second language in Irish be erected along the full length of the streets. or b) Agree that dual language streets signs with a second language in Irish be erected in specified locations within the streets taking into consideration the breakdown of survey results along the length of the street and the current/proposed street sign locations shown on maps provided. 2. Members are further asked to note the survey results for Skegoneill Avenue which failed to meet the 15% threshold in favour of a proposal to have dual language street signs with a second language in Irish erected and agree to this application remaining closed.
3.0	**Main Report**
	<u>Key Issues</u>
3.1	Members are reminded of the Committee report in March 2025 which sought approval to survey Oldpark Road, Donegall Park Avenue and Skegoneill Avenue. These streets were identified as 'long streets' in line with policy during the initial assessment process which also identified the potential for adverse impacts in relation to the carrying out of the survey.
3.2	In relation to long streets the policy states as follows: *'Consideration will to be given to "long streets" where opinion on whether to have a second language street sign may differ between readily identifiable, substantial lengths of the street. In these circumstances, the decision as to the erection of dual language nameplates in certain portions of the street will be made by Committee, exercising its residual discretion and taking into account advice from officers.'*
3.3	The Committee agreed that, in respect of the applications for the erection of dual language street signs in Irish for Oldpark Road, Donegall Park Avenue, and Skegoneill Avenue, that surveys of occupiers of those streets should be carried out with further analysis of the results using the proposed approach for "long streets" as set out in the report.
3.4	Surveys were carried out on all three streets in line with policy and both Oldpark Road and Donegall Park Avenue met the 15% threshold of occupiers in favour of the proposal at survey to have dual language street signs erected with the second language in Irish.
3.5	Accordingly, members are asked to consider the following applications to erect dual language street nameplates showing the name of the street expressed in a language other than English.

The second language is Irish.

3.6

English Name	Non- English Name	Location	Persons surveyed
Donegall Park Avenue	Ascaill Pháirc Dhún na nGall	Between Antrim Road & Shore Road, BT15	205
Oldpark Road	Bóthar na Seanpháirce	Between Ballysillan Road and Crumlin Road, BT14	756

3.7 The translations were authenticated by Queens University, the approved translator for Belfast City Council.

3.8 In accordance with the Council's policy for the erection of dual language street signs, surveys of all persons appearing on the electoral register plus owners or tenants in actual possession of commercial premises for the above streets were carried out and the following responses were received.

3.9 Donegall Park Avenue, BT15. Survey conducted between 6th November 2025 to 3rd December 2025

- 74 occupiers (36.10%) were in favour of the erection of a second street name plate.
- 53 occupiers (25.85%) were not in favour of the erection of a second street name plate.
- 2 occupiers (0.98%) had no preference either way.

3.10 One person commented that they have concerns about erecting dual language signs at the bottom of the Avenue as it would cause conflict or incite vandalism.

3.11 Oldpark Road, BT14 Survey conducted between 9th December 2025 to 14th January 2026.

- 136 occupiers (17.99%) were in favour of the erection of a second street name plate.
- 58 occupiers (7.67%) were not in favour of the erection of a second street name plate.
- 5 occupiers (0.66%) had no preference either way.

3.12 One person commented that the upper part (of the Oldpark Road) is a Unionist area and is part of UK.

3.13 One person commented that the section of the Oldpark Road which starts at the bottom junction with Crumlin Road and the top section at the junction of Ballysillan Road are Unionist areas. In relation to the middle section (The Bone) they have no objection to dual language signage being erected. The person believes the survey process causes friction and upset between Catholics and Protestants. They also believe money will be wasted as the street signs will be damaged.

3.14 One person commented that the Oldpark Road is long and covers a large area. They noted that the bottom and top ends of the Oldpark are Unionist/Loyalist and the middle section (The Bone) is Nationalist/Republican. They also note that the area towards the top end is of mixed religion. They note that it would be a waste of money to erect dual language signs at the top and bottom of the road as they will be vandalised.

<u>Additional Survey Analysis</u>

3.15 As previously agreed by Council, additional analysis of the results of the surveys has been carried out by officers to confirm any difference of opinion in readily identifiable sections, of the street in line with the policy consideration outlined at 3.3 in the report.

3.16	Members can review this analysis which is represented on maps within Appendix A (Donegall Park Avenue) and Appendix B (Oldpark Road). Based on this analysis Members are asked to consider if all the signage locations identified should be replaced with dual language streets signs with a second language in Irish. Alternately members can decide if only specific signs should be replaced / erected and confirm these locations.
	Application Not Meeting Overall Threshold at Street Survey
3.17	Skegoneill Avenue, BT15 Survey conducted between 16th October 2025 to 12th November 2025. 242 persons were surveyed. • 29 occupiers (11.98%) were in favour of the erection of a second street name plate. • 43 occupiers (17.77%) were not in favour of the erection of a second street name plate. • 1 occupier (0.41%) had no preference either way.
3.18	The current policy on dual language street signs states as follows: - "*If the minimum threshold of fifteen percent is not met, the Applicant will be given two weeks to advise the Council of any special circumstances in relation to the application. If such special circumstances relate to the processing of a survey, the Strategic Director of Place and Economy, in conjunction with the City Solicitor and Director of Legal and Civic Services will determine whether such exceptional circumstances exist to refer the matter to Committee. Where exceptional circumstances relate to matters other than the processing of a survey, the matter will be referred to Committee. If there are no special circumstances, the application will end."*
3.19	In this regard the applicant was advised by letter that Skegoneill Avenue failed to meet the threshold and was given two weeks to provide details of any special circumstances pertaining to the application. This correspondence was issued on 14th November 2025 with a deadline of 28th November 2025. No correspondence detailing any special circumstances was received.
3.20	Therefore, given that the survey for this street did not meet the minimum 15% threshold to be considered for approval by committee, and that no exceptional circumstances were raised, no further analysis was carried out, and the application was closed.
	Financial and Resource Implications
3.21	If all the signage in Oldpark Road and Donegal Park Avenue are to be replaced there will be a cost of approximately £**2490** to cover the manufacture and erection of the dual language street signs. The cost for these street signs has been allowed for in the current budget.
	Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment
3.22	Each application for a dual language street sign is subject to an initial assessment and an elected member notification process to identify any potential adverse impacts on equality, good relations and rural needs.
3.23	The initial assessment for Donegall Park Avenue, Oldpark Road and Skegoneill Avenue identified that the carrying out of the surveys had the potential to cause adverse impacts on the grounds of good relations.
3.24	These applications were subsequently screened and draft screening identified that the carrying out of surveys in themselves had the potential to give rise to community tension, as could the erection of the street signs and therefore had the potential to give rise to adverse impact on the grounds of good relations.

3.25	It was acknowledged, however, that the process could alternatively assist in promoting cultural and linguistic diversity. It also determined that the streets met the definition of "long streets" contained in clause 3 (X) of the policy, in that opinion on whether to have a second language street sign may differ between readily identifiable, substantial lengths of the streets.
3.26	The elected member notification carried out for Donegall Park Avenue, Oldpark Road and Skegoneill Avenue did not identify any potential for adverse impacts. The applications were presented to Committee prior to survey in line with the agreed process referencing the initial assessment and screening and the streets were approved for survey by Committee and full Council.
4.0	**Appendices**
4.1	Appendix A – Survey Results for Donegall Park Avenue Appendix B – Survey Results for Oldpark Road

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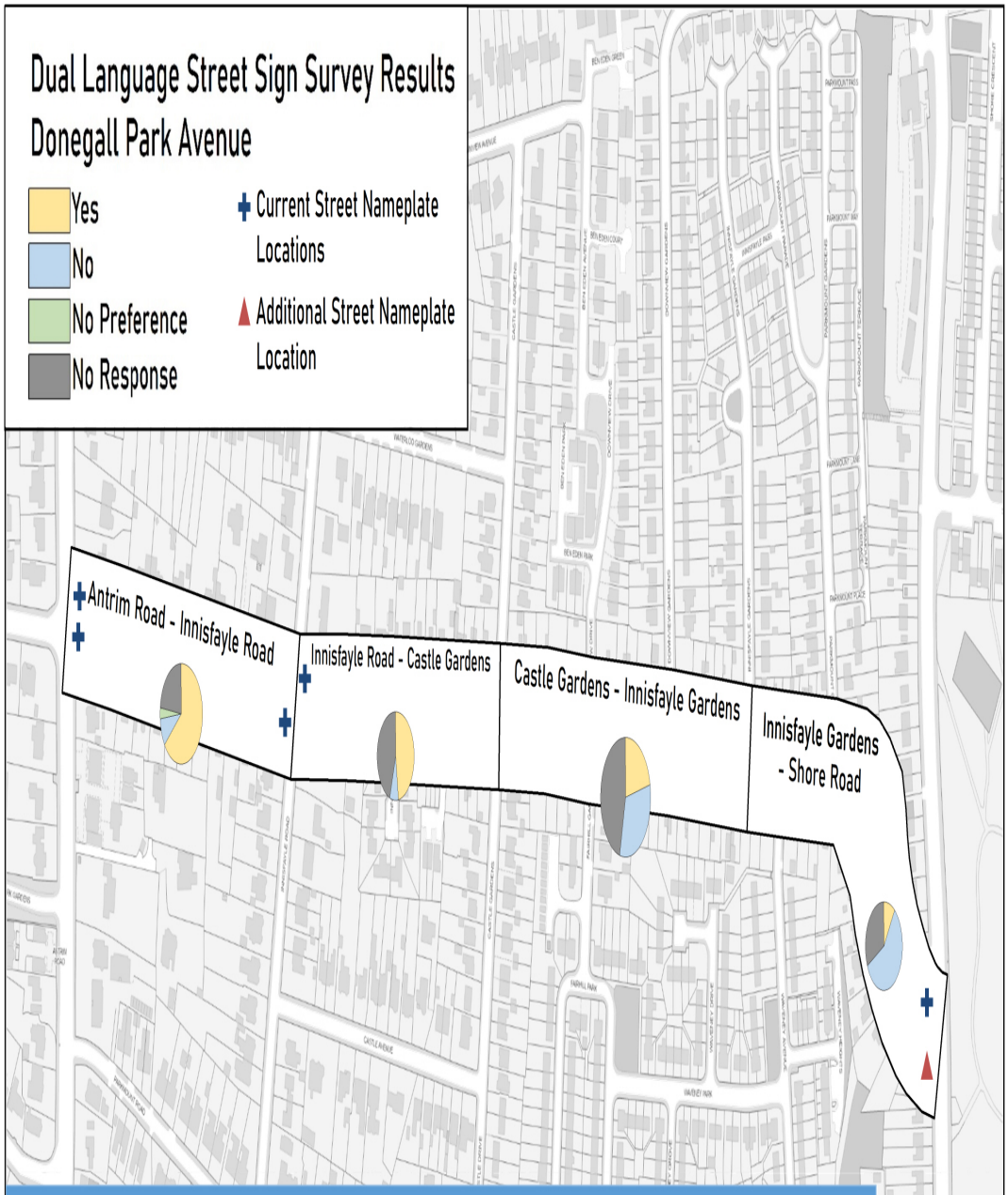

	Yes	No	No Preference	No Response	Total Surveys Issued
Antrim Road - Innisfayle Road	64.3%	8.9%	3.6%	23.2%	56
Innisfayle Road - Castle Gardens	47.5%	7.5%	0.0%	45.0%	40
Castle Gardens - Innisfayle Gardens	21.7%	31.9%	0.0%	46.4%	69
Innisfayle Gardens - Shore Road	10.0%	57.5%	0.0%	32.5%	40
Total	**36.1%**	**25.9%**	**1.0%**	**37.1%**	**205**

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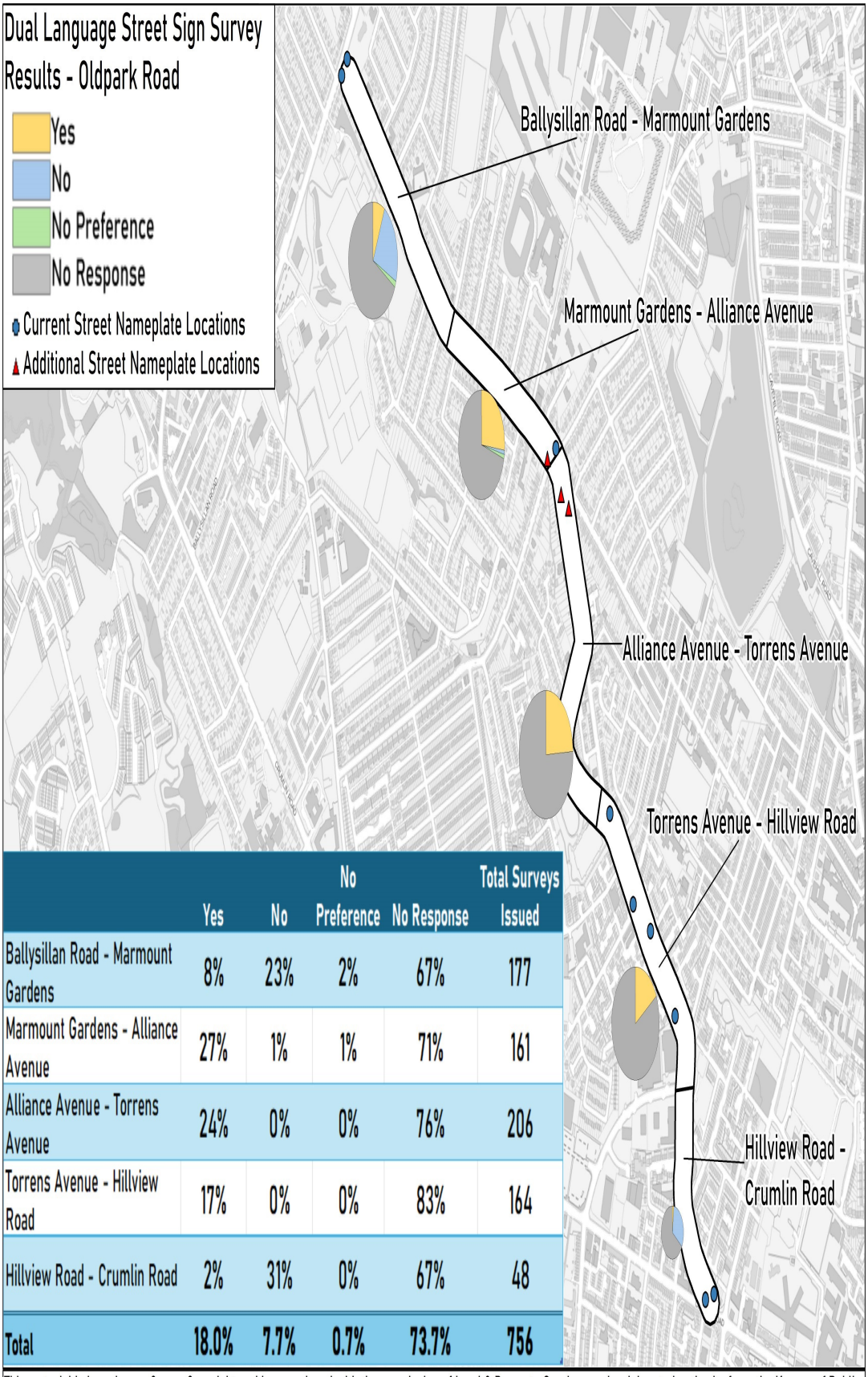

	Yes	No	No Preference	No Response	Total Surveys Issued
Ballysillan Road - Marmount Gardens	8%	23%	2%	67%	177
Marmount Gardens - Alliance Avenue	27%	1%	1%	71%	161
Alliance Avenue - Torrens Avenue	24%	0%	0%	76%	206
Torrens Avenue - Hillview Road	17%	0%	0%	83%	164
Hillview Road - Crumlin Road	2%	31%	0%	67%	48
Total	**18.0%**	**7.7%**	**0.7%**	**73.7%**	**756**

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Belfast City Council

PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES

AGENDA ITEM : PROPOSALS FOR DUAL LANGUAGE STREET SIGNS

Subject:	**Proposals for dual language street signs**
Date:	9th June 2026
Reporting Officer:	Kate Bentley, Director of Planning and Building Control
Contact Officer:	Ian Harper, Building Control Manager, ext. 2430 Heather Wylie, Property and Legal Coordinator, ext. 2464

Restricted Reports

Is this report restricted? **Yes** [ ] **No** [x]

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If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?

After Committee Decision	[ ]
After Council Decision	[ ]
Sometime in the future	[ ]
Never	[ ]

Call-in

Is the decision eligible for Call-in? **Yes** [x] **No** [ ]

1.0	**Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues**
1.1	To consider applications for the erection of dual language street signs for eleven existing streets within the city.
2.0	**Recommendation**
2.1	The Committee is asked to agree to the erection of a second street nameplate in Irish at Ladybrook Park, Flax Street, Blacks Gate Crescent, Upper Castle Park, Teeling View, Larkspur Rise, Laurelbank, Meadow Grove, Fairyknowe Park, Deanby Gardens and Areema Drive.
2.2	Members are asked to note the update in relation to the further report following the debate at Council on the 1st June 2026.
3.0	**Main Report**

Key Issues

3.1 The Council may erect a second street nameplate in a language other than English pursuant to Article 11 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) (NI) Order 1995.

3.2 Members are asked to consider the following applications to erect dual language street nameplates showing the name of the street expressed in a language other than English. The second language is Irish.

3.3

English Name	**Non- English Name**	**Location**	**Persons surveyed**
Ladybrook Park	Páirc Shruthán na Bantiarna	Off Finaghy Road North, BT11	241
Flax Street	Sráid an Lín	Off Crumlin Road, BT14	166
Blacks Gate Crescent	Corrán Gheata Mhic Giolla Dhuibh	Off Blacks Gate Avenue, BT10	28
Upper Castle Park	Páirc an Chaisleáin Uachtarach	Off North Circular Road, BT15	32
Teeling View	Radharc Thaoiling	Off Teeling Grove, BT17	38
Larkspur Rise	Ard na Sál Fuiseoige	Off Suffolk Road, BT11	44
Laurelbank	Bruach an Labhrais	Off Bell Steel Road, BT17	440
Meadow Grove	Garrán na Cluana	Off Stratheden Street, BT15	23
Fairyknowe Park	Páirc Chnocán na Sióg	Off Whitewell Road, BT36	103
Deanby Gardens	Gairdíní Deanby	Off Oldpark Road, BT14	28
Areema Drive	Céide Loch an Mhadhma	Off Upper Dunmurry Lane, BT17	193

3.4 The translations were authenticated by Queens University, the approved translator for Belfast City Council.

3.5 In accordance with the Council's policy for the erection of dual language street signs, surveys of all persons appearing on the electoral register plus owners or tenants in actual possession of commercial premises for the above streets were carried out and the following responses were received.

3.6	Ladybrook Park, BT11 • 105 occupiers (43.57%) were in favour of the erection of a second street name plate. • 4 occupiers (1.66%) were not in favour of the erection of a second street name plate. • 4 occupiers (1.66%) had no preference either way.
3.7	Flax Street, BT14 • 46 occupiers (27.71%) were in favour of the erection of a second street name plate.
3.8	Blacks Gate Crescent, BT10 • 11 occupiers (39.29%) were in favour of the erection of a second street name plate. • 1 occupier (3.57%) had no preference either way.
3.9	Upper Castle Park, BT15 • 18 occupiers (56.25%) were in favour of the erection of a second street name plate. • 1 occupier (3.13%) was not in favour of the erection of a second street name plate. • 1 occupier (3.13%) had no preference either way.
3.10	Teeling View, BT17 • 10 occupiers (26.32%) were in favour of the erection of a second street name plate.
3.11	Larkspur Rise, BT11 • 13 occupiers (29.55%) were in favour of the erection of a second street name plate.
3.12	Laurelbank, BT17 • 71 occupiers (16.14%) were in favour of the erection of a second street name plate.
3.13	Meadow Grove, BT15 • 8 occupiers (34.78%) were in favour of the erection of a second street name plate.
3.14	Fairyknowe Park, BT36 • 32 occupiers (31.07%) were in favour of the erection of a second street name plate. • 4 occupiers (3.88%) were not in favour of the erection of a second street name plate.
3.15	Deanby Gardens, BT14 • 13 occupiers (46.43%) were in favour of the erection of a second street name plate. • 3 occupiers (10.71%) were not in favour of the erection of a second street name plate.

3.16 Areema Drive, BT17

- 54 occupiers (27.98%) were in favour of the erection of a second street name plate.
- 16 occupiers (8.29%) were not in favour of the erection of a second street name plate.
- 2 occupiers (1.04%) had no preference either way.

Assessment against policy

3.17 The Council's policy on the erection of a second street nameplate requires that at least fifteen percent (15%) of the occupiers surveyed must be in favour of the proposal to erect a second street sign in a language other than English, to progress to Committee for consideration.

3.18 All the surveys listed above demonstrate compliance with the threshold contained within the policy.

Applications failing to meet the 15% threshold, for information.

3.19 Members are advised that the following applications to erect dual language street nameplates failed to meet the 15% threshold. Each applicant was given the opportunity to advise the Council of any special circumstances in relation to their application. The council did not receive notification of any special circumstances from the applicants for each of the streets listed below. In line with the policy, where there are no special circumstances, these applications are considered to have ended and have been closed.

Street	Language	Surveys Issued	For	Against	No preference
Knockeden Crescent	Irish	100	13 (13%)	32 (32%)	1 (1%)
Willowfield Gardens	Irish	69	6 (8.70%)	31 (44.93%)	1 (1.45%)
Pilot Street	Irish	92	9 (9.78%)	1 (1.09%)	0
Caffrey Avenue	Irish	162	24 (14.81%)	0	0
Glenwood View	Irish	54	7 (12.96%)	0	0

Data Collection and Review of Dual Language Street Sign Policy

3.20 A number of issues were raised at the Council meeting on the 1 June 2026 relating to the data collection report considered at last months committee and the review of the Dual Language Street Sign Policy.

3.21 It was stated at Council that a further report would be brought before members on the matters raised. Due consideration will need to be given to the matters and a potential timetable and process for review of the Dual Language Street Sign Policy. It is therefore intended that the further report encompassing all such matters will be brought to the August 2026 Committee.

Financial and Resource Implications

3.22	There is a cost of approximately £3750 to cover the cost of the manufacturing and erection of the dual language street signs. The cost for these street signs has been allowed for in the current budget.
	Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment
3.23	Each application for a dual language street sign is subject to an initial assessment and an elected member notification process to identify any potential adverse impacts on equality, good relations and rural needs.
3.24	The initial assessments and elected member notification carried out for the applications being considered did not identify any potential adverse impacts to prevent the surveys being carried out.
3.25	The elected member notification carried out for 5th March 2025 did not identify any potential for adverse impacts.
4.0	**Appendices**
	None

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Belfast City Council

PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES

DUAL LANGUAGE STREET SIGN APPLICATIONS FOR FERNWOOD STREET,CLIFTONPARK AVENUE AND DROMORE STREET.

Subject:	Dual language street sign applications with the second language in Irish for Fernwood Street, Cliftonpark Avenue and Dromore Street.
Date:	12th May 2026
Reporting Officer:	Kate Bentley, Director of Planning and Building Control
Contact Officer:	Ian Harper, Building Control Manager ext 2430 Alan Mayrs, Principal Building Control Surveyor, ext. 2428

Restricted Reports

Is this report restricted? **Yes** [ ] **No** [x]

Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.

Insert number [ ]

1. Information relating to any individual
2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual
3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information)
4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter
5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained
6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction
7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime

If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?

After Committee Decision	[ ]
After Council Decision	[ ]
Sometime in the future	[ ]
Never	[ ]

Call-in

Is the decision eligible for Call-in? **Yes** [x] **No** [ ]

1.0	**Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues**
1.1	To consider if a street survey of occupiers will be carried out for three applications for the erection of dual language street signs in Irish within the city where potential adverse impacts have been identified by the initial assessments.
2.0	**Recommendation**
2.1	1. Members are asked to consider the report and matters raised in relation to the applications for dual language street signs in Irish received for Fernwood Street, Cliftonpark Avenue and Dromore Street and either: a) Agree that surveys of occupiers of these streets be carried out. or b) Agree that no surveys will be carried out on the grounds of the potential adverse impacts identified and these applications are closed.
	Main Report
	<u>Key Issues</u>
3.1	The power for the Council to consider applications to erect a second street nameplate in a language other than English is contained in Article 11 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) (NI) Order 1995.
3.2	The Dual Language Street Sign policy states that "*each application will be subject to an initial assessment for any potential adverse impacts on equality, good relations and rural needs and where any adverse impacts are identified that information will be brought to Committee*."
3.3	The initial assessments were carried out for these three streets and potential adverse impacts were identified.
3.4	Draft equality screenings were therefore carried out, assessing the request for dual language street signs in Irish on Fernwood Street, Cliftonpark Avenue and Dromore Street for equality and good relations issues.
3.5	The screenings have identified that the carrying out of surveys and the erection of Irish language street signs in these areas has the potential to give rise to community tension. Conversely the screenings also identified that the process could assist in promoting cultural and linguistic diversity. The findings are outlined in the equality and good relation section below.
3.6	The council retains 'residual discretion' in relation to these applications. In effect this gives elected members the option not to proceed to survey and/ or halt the erection of a dual language street sign in a street where, in the view of elected members this action would be considered inappropriate
3.7	These applications are therefore being brought to Committee to determine if surveys of residents of these streets will take place, considering the information presented in the report.
	<u>Financial & Resource Implications</u>
3.8	If it is decided to carry out surveys, the resulting tasks are included within existing resources and budgets for the process.
	<u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u>

3.9	An EQIA was carried out on the Dual Language Street Signs policy in 2021-22. This confirmed the initial assessment process to be carried out, which may indicate the requirement for equality screening.
3.10	The applications for dual language street signs (with the second language in Irish) at Fernwood Street, Cliftonpark Avenue and Dromore Street were assessed for equality of opportunity and good relations issues through the initial assessment process. This process identified that the potential for adverse impact existed and recommended further screening prior to referral to committee for authority to proceed to survey.
3.11	The draft screenings have identified that the carrying out of a survey in itself in these areas has the potential to give rise to community tension, as could the erection of the street signs and therefore has the potential to give rise to adverse impact on the grounds of good relations. It is acknowledged; however, the process could alternatively assist in promoting cultural and linguistic diversity.
3.12	The applications were also presented to elected members as part of the elected member notification procedure, and no objections were received. .
4.0	**Appendices**
4.1	None

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