

Consultation on new rules for selling and supplying puppies and kittens

2nd June 2025



Department of
**Agriculture, Environment
and Rural Affairs**

An Roinn

**Talmhaíochta, Comhshaoil
agus Gnóthaí Tuaithe**

Depairtment o'

**Fairmin, Environment
an' Kintra Matthers**

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Ministerial Foreword



I am pleased to launch this public consultation on proposed new rules for selling, giving away, and otherwise transferring ownership of puppies and kittens, in Northern Ireland.

Enhancing animal welfare is one of my top priorities. To ensure that our pet dogs and cats receive the best possible start in life, I am committed to introducing changes that will promote their well-being and provide assurances on their welfare and origin to prospective new owners.

Having carefully considered the numerous appeals for a ban on the sale of puppies and kittens by intermediaries who do not breed the animals (commonly referred to as Lucy's Law), I have also evaluated the evidence underpinning the need to examine all aspects of both the act of giving away, or selling, a puppy or kitten.

While licensed dog breeding establishments and many responsible dog and cat owners adhere to ethical practices when selling puppies and kittens, there are instances where less-responsible individuals breed these animals in poor welfare conditions. These young animals often endure distressing journeys to unsuspecting purchasers who are unaware of the origins of their new pets. Concerns have been raised that many young animals sold by third parties develop health issues and behavioural problems due to early separation from their mothers and exposure to unfamiliar environments, potentially involving multiple journeys. This can result in an increased risk of disease and inadequate socialisation for the puppies and kittens, which may persist throughout their lives.

Therefore, I want to introduce an innovative, yet simple system for selling, giving away, or otherwise transferring ownership of puppies and kittens in Northern Ireland.

To achieve this, my Department is proposing that anyone who sells, gives away, or otherwise transfers the ownership of puppies and kittens must first apply to their local council to be entered into a Register of Sellers and Suppliers of Puppies and Kittens. Although councils would have powers to carry out an inspection of premises for the purposes of granting



registration, they would not be obliged to do so. Using Northern Ireland's current dog licensing system, councils would be able to establish that the owner of the puppies holds a valid dog licence for the puppies' mother. Finally, it is also my intention that councils will publish a list of sellers and suppliers of puppies and kittens who have registered with them.

Animal welfare will be at the heart of the new system, as the system will aid transparency and make it easier to identify individuals who are operating in ways which compromise animal welfare. Furthermore, it will aim to drive responsible pet ownership by encouraging neutering to avoid unplanned pregnancies, therefore helping to reduce the numbers of dogs and cats and the associated pressures on councils and rescue and rehoming organisations.

I encourage anyone who feels they can contribute to respond to this consultation so that together, we can improve the welfare of our puppies and kittens when going to new homes.

Andrew Muir, MLA

Minister for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs



Chapter 1: Introduction





Chapter 1: Introduction

The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (the Department) is seeking views on a proposal to introduce a registration system for persons selling, giving away, or otherwise transferring ownership of puppies and kittens aged under six months old.

A key objective of the Department is to end third-party sales of puppies and kittens. A third-party sale is a sale that occurs when the seller has not bred the animal themselves but has obtained the puppy or kitten from a breeder so that they can sell it onwards.

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 of companion animal welfare, and any person or organisation involved in the breeding, sale, or transfer of ownership of puppies and kittens. The list of consultees (**Appendix 1**) is not, however, 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 four chapters. Chapter two provides some background to selling pet animals in Northern Ireland, and the legislation in place in other jurisdictions. Chapter three details the Department's proposals (a summary can be found at **Appendix 2**) and sets out a series of questions on these proposals. Chapter four outlines the procedure for providing responses to the paper. Equality, rural needs screening, and regulatory impact exercises have been carried out and can be found at:

<https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/consultations>.

The Department welcomes any comments that consultees might have on any of these exercises.

Councils

The Department has engaged with local councils on the proposals outlined in this document and acknowledges the concerns raised including the resource implications and extension of enforcement responsibilities to include cats. Therefore, the Department would specifically invite detailed feedback from councils relating to the administration and enforcement of the current proposal, as well as any additional or alternative measures which could be put in place to deliver the objectives of improving the welfare of puppies and kittens and realise the benefits outlined in Chapter Three.



The consultation is being conducted using the online survey tool Citizen Space and will commence on **2 June 2025**. It will run for 12 weeks, closing on **25 August 2025**.

Following analysis of the responses received, the Department will consider and publish a summary of the responses. Subject to the nature of those responses, the Department will then take the steps to introduce legislation to require a registration system for all persons selling, giving away, or otherwise transferring ownership of puppies and kittens in Northern Ireland. Please note that responses from groups will be considered as one response.



Chapter 2: Background





Chapter 2: Background

Getting a puppy or kitten in Northern Ireland

Anyone can sell, give away, or transfer the ownership of, a puppy or kitten in Northern Ireland. Some people operate a licensed dog breeding establishment and sell the puppies they breed, and others sell the offspring of the family pet. The People's Dispensary for Sick Animals PAW Report 2024 indicates that (from a sample of 2,371 owners): 33% obtained their dog from breeders; 25% from private sellers; 17% from rescue and rehoming centres; and 16% from a friend, family, or neighbour.

Since the introduction of Lucy's Law in England¹, Scotland and then Wales, which each ban the third-party sales of puppies and kittens, there has been significant interest in examining how puppies and kittens are sold or acquired by new owners in Northern Ireland. There have also been extensive calls to end third-party sales of puppies and kittens in Northern Ireland.

Rationale for change

While it is recommended that the citizens of Northern Ireland carefully consider and conduct research before acquiring a new puppy or kitten², in practice, many make impulsive decisions when confronted with an adorable animal, purchasing it without further deliberation. On many occasions the purchaser will not have any information about the person selling the animal, or the animal itself. At times, this transaction will have a happy ending, as the seller has looked after the animal well, and the purchaser will have gotten a healthy, well-adjusted, and happy animal. Other times, however, the seller may not have given the puppy or kitten a good start in life and might not even have looked after its basic welfare needs.

In some cases, the seller might not even have bred the puppy or kitten, and the purchaser will not really know where it came from. These transactions can have a different ending, as the puppy or kitten might be sick, and might have significant developmental issues.

Research shows that sub-optimal purchasing behaviours such as not viewing a puppy in-person, before purchase, leave owners vulnerable to unscrupulous breeders and dealers whose main goal is profit, and will have produced puppies with little concern for the health and welfare of the puppies they produce, or the dogs they use for breeding.

¹ [Ban of third party sales of pups and kittens, known as 'Lucy's Law', confirmed - GOV.UK](#)

² [What you need to know before you buy a puppy | nidirect: The Pup Contract - for responsible pup breeding and buying.](#)



If a person cannot get a puppy from a rescue and rehoming organisation, they are encouraged to use licensed, and responsible, breeders.

Sourcing directly from the breeder will mean that the puppy or kitten will likely have spent the important early formative weeks with its mother. It is likely that the licensed, or regular, breeder will have made sure the mum is healthy and well, and that the puppy, or kitten, got the best start in life. For example, they may have made sure the puppies were: weaned appropriately; vaccinated and wormed; and socialised properly. Where a person is selling the offspring of the family pet, even though they are not a licensed, or regular, breeder, they too will likely have given the puppy or kitten the best start in life, as far as they know how to.

On the other hand, puppies purchased from someone who did not breed the animal themselves, may have experienced poor welfare conditions, for example: weaned too early; not properly vaccinated or wormed; not socialised; and separated from their mother too soon. They may also have been subjected to multiple journeys before they reach their new owner.

Some buyers may mistakenly believe that their puppy comes directly from a reputable breeder, when in reality it was bred under poor conditions and trafficked through multiple people. This makes it nearly impossible for the final buyer to trace the genetic lineage of the puppy, thereby leaving them unaware of its heritage and potential disease risks.

In summary, acquiring puppies from third-party individuals who are not the breeders themselves may increase the likelihood that the puppies or kittens did not have the best start in life. Similarly, some sellers who bred the puppy themselves may not meet the minimum standards of animal welfare.

The laws about selling pets in other jurisdictions

Prior to 2018, the systems in place across England, Scotland, and Wales were similar to the system currently in place in Northern Ireland. That is, separate pieces of legislation set out the rules for petshops, and dog breeding establishments.

England

In England, the Licensing of Activities Involving Animals (England) Regulations 2018 introduced a new single system based around licensable activities, one of which being selling animals as pets in the course of a business. Since then, a licence is required by anyone selling animals as pets in the course of a business, either directly to the public or to any other business that will later sell them as pets, and they must adhere to licence conditions such as not selling puppies or kittens aged under eight weeks.



Lucy's Law was introduced, from 2020, and provides that a person who is licensed to sell animals as pets, is also banned from selling any puppies or kittens that they did not breed. This particular provision takes its name from Lucy, a rescue dog which had suffered from the effects of intensive breeding and mistreatment on an illegal breeding establishment.

Scotland

Since 2021, Scotland has also operated a system of licensing activities involving animals under the Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (Scotland) Regulations 2021. Selling animals as pets in the course of a business requires a licence and the licence conditions are comparable to those in place in England.

Wales

Similar legislation applies in Wales for selling animals as pets in the course of a business; however, the Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (Wales) Regulations 2021 enacts a Lucy's Law which differs slightly from that in place in England and Scotland, in that the puppy or kitten must be sold from the premises where the animal was bred.

Republic of Ireland

In the Republic of Ireland, the Animal Health and Welfare (Sale or Supply of Pet Animals) Regulations 2019, require sellers or suppliers of six or more pet animals in a calendar year to be entered into the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) Register of Sellers and Suppliers of Pet Animals, and premises used in connection with the sale and supply of pet animals must be entered into the DAFM Register of Premises.



Chapter 3: Proposals





Chapter 3: Proposals

The Department wishes to afford a high degree of protections for puppies and kittens, that are sold or supplied in Northern Ireland. To do this, the Department wishes to deliver a version of Lucy's Law which includes measures that would not only ban third-party sales of puppies and kittens but would also make new rules for all people who decide to sell, give away or otherwise transfer ownership of a puppy. While keeping the welfare of our puppies and kittens at its heart, the proposed system will also generate transparency and accountability in the marketplace and enable prospective purchasers to identify where their pet was bred, and by whom.

The Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 sets out the enabling powers regarding any new animal welfare legislation and also specifies that the Department is responsible for enforcement in terms of farmed animals; the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) in terms of animal fighting; and councils in terms of non-farmed or companion animals. Therefore, for the proposed new rules about the sale and supply of puppies and kittens, local councils will be the enforcement and regulatory body.

Proposed requirement to register with council

It is proposed to require anyone wishing to sell, give away, or otherwise transfer the ownership of puppies and kittens, to apply to their local council to be entered into a Register of Sellers and Suppliers of Puppies and Kittens. Council operated dog-pounds and registered animal rescue and rehoming charities would be exempt from this requirement, as too, would anyone giving puppies or kittens to a registered animal rescue and rehoming charity. Registration will mean that, for the period of one year, the registered person can sell, give away, or otherwise transfer the ownership of all the puppies and kittens bred by him/her, which were born at the registered address during that year.

This registration requirement will extend to:

- businesses, including dog breeding establishments and petshops; and
- anyone not operating as a business.

The Department considers that extending the requirement to people not operating as a business will help prevent any potential loopholes for unscrupulous persons to declare that they are not operating as a business and are therefore exempt from the new registration requirements.

The registration would be valid for a period of 12 months, and will be made public.



Question 1

Do you agree that any person who wishes to sell, give away, or otherwise transfer the ownership of puppies should be required to register with their local council?

Question 2

Do you agree that any person who wishes to sell, give away, or otherwise transfer the ownership of kittens should be required to register with their local council?

Proposed exemptions

Registered rescue and rehoming charities

Rescue and rehoming organisations play a vital role in rehabilitating unwanted or abandoned puppies and kittens and finding new, responsible owners for these animals. The Department recognises that it is essential that these organisations should be able to continue this work unimpeded. Therefore, it is proposed that any person who gives the puppy or kitten to a rescue or rehoming organisation which is registered with the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland would be exempt from the proposed registration requirement.

Council-operated dog pounds

Councils have powers to establish and maintain dog pounds, and to deal with unwanted and unclaimed straying dogs. Council-operated dog pounds offer several benefits, both for the community and for the animals they care for. For those dogs that cannot be reunited with their owners, council-operated dog pounds facilitate giving dogs new homes, while also helping to reduce the number of excess animals in the community. The Department recognises the operation of this type of dog pound is a matter for councils, and therefore, it is proposed that council-operated dog pounds would be exempt from the proposed registration requirement.



When a buyer changes their mind

Anyone giving puppies or kittens to an animal rescue and rehoming registered charity would be exempt from the requirement to register with their council. Any person who has acquired a puppy or kitten, either from a registered seller or supplier, from a Council-operated dog pound, or from an animal rescue and rehoming registered charity, and then shortly thereafter, decides that they no longer want to keep it would not be eligible to register with their local council as a seller or supplier, as they did not breed the animal themselves and would therefore be unable to meet all the registration conditions. They could explore giving the puppies or kittens to a registered animal rescue and rehoming charity, or they could potentially seek to return the animal to the person they purchased it from. Alternatively, they could sell, give away, or otherwise transfer the ownership of the puppy or kitten once it reached the age of six months old.

The Department considers it is necessary to restrict the options available to legally move a puppy or kitten under six months old to prevent any loopholes for third-party sellers.

Question 3

Do you agree with the proposed list of exempted groups who will be exempt from the proposed new rules?

If not, which groups do you believe should be exempted?



Proposed registration fee

It is proposed that a person who wishes to be entered into the council's Register of Sellers and Suppliers of Puppies and Kittens must pay a fee.

Fee for pet owners

The Department recognises that some pet dog and cat owners might find they are faced with an unexpected pregnancy or an unplanned litter, and will not wish to keep the offspring. It is proposed that, for these pet owners:

- the first year of registration will be free of charge. It is considered that this will encourage those pet owners to take action to prevent any further unplanned pregnancies by getting their dog or cat neutered; and
- the second year of registration will attract the fee. The fee will be payable for any second application to be entered into the Register of Sellers and Suppliers of Puppies and Kittens.

Fee for businesses

For all persons who hold a dog breeding licence or a petshop licence, and are therefore in the business of selling animals, it is proposed a fee should be paid for registration in the Register of Sellers and Suppliers of Puppies and Kittens.

It is proposed that each council should have the ability to set an appropriate fee to recoup the costs of administration, service delivery and enforcement using the principle of “full cost recovery”. It is considered that the ability to define fees at a local level is essential to ensure that councils can recover associated expenditure, reducing the risk of subsidies from local ratepayers, and that businesses do not pay more than necessary.

Question 4

Do you agree that the first year of registration should be free of charge, except for businesses?



Proposed application process

Any person wishing to be entered onto the Register of Sellers and Suppliers of Puppies and Kittens will have to apply to their local council to be registered. Anyone subsequently entered into the council's Register of Sellers and Suppliers of Puppies and Kittens, will only be able to sell, give away, or otherwise transfer ownership of their animals, from the registered address. The mother of the animals must also be at the registered address.

Links to council dog licence records

Registrations will be linked to the current dog licensing system. Northern Ireland is in a unique position of being the only jurisdiction in the UK that requires owners of dogs to obtain a yearly licence to keep their dog. Anyone wishing to sell, give away, or otherwise transfer ownership of their dog's puppies will therefore already be legally obliged to hold a dog licence for the puppies' mother.

Making use of the dog licensing system can ensure that the puppies are only being sold from their place of birth, by the person who owns the mother and has bred from her.

Council role: no requirement to inspect premises

It is considered not practical to visit every house/premises from which a person wishes to sell or supply puppies or kittens, and therefore it is proposed that there will be no mandatory inspection of houses/premises, prior to successful registration.

It is proposed that there will be no requirement for local councils to inspect the applicant's premises before entering a person into the Register of Sellers and Suppliers of Puppies and Kittens, but rather they will be required to verify that:

- the applicant who wishes to sell puppies holds a valid dog licence, or block licence, for the pup's biological mother, and that the biological mother is licensed to the address where the puppies were born and will be sold from;
- the dog breeding establishment or petshop that wishes to sell puppies holds a valid licence to keep a dog breeding establishment or petshop, and that the biological mother is licensed to the address where the puppies were born and will be sold from;
- the applicant who wishes to sell kittens, is at an address where the biological mother is kept and where the kittens were born and will be sold from.



Verification will include obtaining the licence numbers regarding the dog licence, dog breeding establishment licence, and petshop licence. As microchipping of dogs is mandatory, it will also include obtaining microchip numbers regarding the puppies.

Anticipated impact of proposed registration system

Anyone who sells puppies and kittens in Northern Ireland, will be required to be registered with their council. Where that person also sells puppies and kittens in other jurisdictions, they will be required to comply with the legislation in place in that jurisdiction.

Question 5

Do you agree that a person who sells, gives away, or otherwise transfers the ownership of puppies and kittens, should be required to do so at the address where the puppies and kittens, and the biological mother are kept?

Proposed conditions for registration

The Department proposes that any person entered into the Register of Sellers and Suppliers of Puppies and Kittens must meet the following conditions:

- the registered person cannot sell, give away, or otherwise transfer the ownership of puppies or kittens **which they did not breed at the registered address**;
- the registered person cannot sell, give away, or otherwise transfer the ownership of puppies or kittens **that are unweaned**, weaned at an age at which they should not have been weaned, or **aged under eight weeks** old;
- a puppy or kitten may only be shown to a prospective purchaser or new owner if it is **together with its biological mother**. There will be an exemption if the biological mother has died;
- the sale of, giving away of, or otherwise transfer of ownership of a puppy or kitten must take place in person and when the puppy or kitten is in the presence of its biological mother and must be **completed in the presence of the prospective purchaser** or new owner at the **registered address**. Exemptions will be in place to accommodate for a change of address;



- the purchaser or new owner **must be provided with specified information** on caring for a puppy or kitten, and with information on dog licensing requirements;
- the registered person must **keep and maintain a register** for all the dogs and cats, including puppies and kittens, on the premises, which must include:
 - the animal's date of birth;
 - the animal's sex;
 - details of any veterinary treatment;
 - the puppy's microchip number;
 - the kitten's microchip number (if applicable), or identification details;
 - the date of the sale, giving away, or otherwise transfer of ownership of the puppy or kitten; and
 - the name, address, and telephone number of the new owner.
- Where an animal is undergoing any medical treatment—
 - this fact must be clearly indicated—
 - in writing next to it, or
 - (where appropriate) by labelling it accordingly, and
 - it must not be sold, given away, or otherwise transferred to a new owner.

The Department considers that these are minimum conditions necessary to allow an inspector to assess compliance or investigate any traceability issues and that they are therefore proportionate.

Question 6

Do you agree with the conditions of registration, as listed above?



Proposed conditions for advertising puppies and kittens

It is proposed that any advertisement for the sale, giving away, or other transfer of ownership of a puppy or kitten must:

- include the registration number;
- specify the council that entered the person into the Register of Sellers and Suppliers of Puppies and Kittens;
- include a recognisable photograph of the puppy or kitten being advertised;
- display the age of the puppy or kitten being advertised;
- state the puppy or kitten being sold, given away, or otherwise transferred to a new owner is resident in Northern Ireland;
- state the puppy or kitten being sold, given away, or otherwise transferred to a new owner was born in Northern Ireland; and
- contain a warning about the life-changing decision that buying / getting a new puppy or kitten is.

The Department anticipates that the addition of advertising requirements will enable prospective buyers or new owners of puppies or kittens to verify the legitimacy of the sale, giving away of, or otherwise transfer of ownership prior to purchasing an animal, and it will further aid local councils in identifying any fraudulent activity, for example, selling, giving away, or otherwise transferring ownership without first being entered onto the council Register of Sellers and Suppliers of Puppies and Kittens.

Question 7

Do you agree that any advertisement for the sale of, giving away of, or other transfer of ownership of a puppy or kitten must include the information as listed above?



Proposed online publication of Register of Sellers and Suppliers of Puppies and Kittens

It is proposed that local councils will be required to publish a Register of Sellers and Suppliers of Puppies and Kittens, and are therefore legally able to sell, give away, or otherwise transfer ownership of puppies and kittens, including the following information:

- registered person's name and address;
- registration number;
- date on which registration was granted;
- date registration was renewed;
- date registration will expire;
- animals the registered person is registered to sell, give away, or otherwise transfer ownership of (i.e. kittens, puppies, or both); and
- if the registration has been suspended.

The Department considers the publication of a register, which would be available online, would provide the public with assurance that their new puppy or kitten came from a suitable breeding environment, as anyone selling, giving away, or otherwise transferring ownership of these animals whose details are not included on the register would be considered an illegal breeder.

Question 8

Do you agree that an online, public Register of Sellers and Suppliers of Puppies and Kittens should publish the detail, as listed above?



Offences

Under the proposed legislation it would be an offence not to be registered with the council prior to selling, giving away or otherwise transferring ownership of a puppy or kitten under six months old. It would also be an offence to breach any of the conditions of registration. The relevant local council would be able to take enforcement action. The maximum penalty available for the most serious of offences is a fine of £5,000 and/or six months imprisonment.

Expected outcomes

Animal Welfare

The proposed legislation will help promote positive change in the lives of Northern Ireland's puppies and kittens, and potentially their parents. Any person selling, giving away, or otherwise transferring the ownership of puppies and kittens will be required to comply with specified conditions, such as sales to be completed in the presence of the purchaser on the registered premises, and the puppy or kitten must be with its mother. These conditions are designed to help breeders to improve the conditions of their animals, and get young animals off to the best start in life.

Protection of vulnerable animals

The proposed legislation will help protect Northern Ireland's puppies and kittens, including those who are vulnerable. Registered sellers and suppliers will be empowered to sell only puppies and kittens that they have bred themselves at the registered premises, and will be prohibited from selling sick animals. In addition, they will be required to comply with specific conditions that promote animal welfare, such as providing appropriate living conditions, and ensuring they receive adequate veterinary care. They will also be required to comply with specific conditions relating to how any online advertisements should look, so as to give the prospective new owner as much information as possible about the purchasing decision they are about to make.

Protecting the public

The proposed legislation will help protect prospective pet owners who do not want to support a cruel industry, but are duped by someone offering a cute puppy or kitten, available immediately.



Where the transfer of the animals happens in a car park, or, as in recent times, in a house portrayed as a family home but which is actually a short term rental, the true conditions of where the animal has been bred, and condition of the animals, may not become apparent immediately. If it has been poorly bred there can be complications which are not only costly but emotionally stressful for owners. Additionally, even when prospective owners do realise the puppy has come from a so-called illegal puppy farm, many wish to rescue the puppy from the situation.

Where a prospective purchaser is researching online, the requirement for the seller / supplier to include specified information in the advertisement, will provide an added layer of protection to reassure the purchaser of the legality of the seller/supplier. It will also provide a further reminder to the new owner, of the importance of the purchasing decision they are about to make.

A public register of persons registered as sellers and suppliers of puppies and kittens will mean that the public will be directed to the right place, thereby reducing sales via third-party persons. It will inform the public, and raise awareness, about the importance of acquiring pets from responsible sources, and deter individuals from purchasing animals from unregistered, and therefore illegal, sellers/suppliers.

Traceability

The proposed legislation will help prospective pet owners identify responsible breeders and sellers. It will help them identify where their new pet has come from, and feel confident in knowing that the seller/supplier is a responsible breeder. That is, if the seller/supplier is not on the Register, it is anticipated that the purchaser will simply walk away from the transaction, and might even report suspected illegal activity. If the seller/supplier is on the Register, they will be subject to registration requirements that are designed to help purchasers know where their puppy/kitten has come from, and to give them confidence that the seller/supplier is operating in compliance with the law.

The proposed policy will also drive compliance with current dog licensing requirements. Dog owners who do not currently obtain the required annual licence to keep their dog, would be forced to obtain that licence before they were able to be entered into the Register of Sellers and Suppliers of Puppies and Kittens.

Responsible pet ownership

For the potential buyer, the proposed legislation has the potential to raise awareness about getting puppies and kittens from responsible sources. Even when viewing an online advertisement about a new puppy or kitten they are interested in, they will be reminded of the



life-changing decision they are about to make.

For the seller/supplier, the proposed legislation will act as a deterrent to accidental litters. Where a person's dog or cat has an accidental litter and they register with the council in order to sell or supply the offspring, if the person then decides not to neuter the animal and it then has a second accidental litter, they will be required to pay a fee for each subsequent year they wish to sell or supply offspring. Where owners decide to neuter their pet, this will help control pet overpopulation and reduce the number of animals that end up in shelters.

Identifying illegal breeders

In practice, this proposal will mean the matter of selling puppies and kittens will be much more open and transparent, and all purchasers wishing to get a puppy or kitten will be able to establish that someone who does not hold the required registration status is selling or supplying the animals illegally.

The sale of the puppy or kitten must be completed in the presence of the purchaser on the registered premises, and the animal must be with its mother. This will enable councils to identify premises in their districts which are used for breeding and selling puppies and kittens.

The requirement for advertisements to include the number of the seller/supplier's registration and to specify the council that issued the registration, enables prospective buyers to verify the legitimacy of the sale. In addition, this will provide councils with another tool to enable them to identify any fraudulent activity.

Councils will be empowered to inspect premises if they deem necessary, including in response to a complaint about potential illegal activity. This will help disrupt the activities of illegal breeders and ultimately improve animal welfare.

Impact outside of Northern Ireland

The proposed legislation will apply to Northern Ireland, and therefore will have an impact on sales, give-aways, and transfers of ownership, which take place in Northern Ireland.

The Department has received calls to end the sales in England, of puppies born in Northern Ireland. However, the proposed legislation will not affect the sale, giving away, or otherwise transferring ownership, of puppies and kittens born in Northern Ireland, where they are taken to another jurisdiction for sale/supply. Regulation of these selling activities will be the responsibility of authorities in those jurisdictions.



Conclusion

The Department recognises that regulation alone will not stop all third-party sales. That is going to take a concerted effort by members of the public, future dog owners, responsible breeders and enforcement agencies to work together to identify anyone, either registered or unregistered, who is putting financial gain before the welfare needs of their dogs and cats.

However, this proposal clearly sets out the welfare standards with which anyone seeking to sell, give away or otherwise transfer ownership of a puppy or kitten, must comply. More importantly, they provide the powers to allow action to be taken where those standards are not met. Council inspectors will also have clear standards for applying strong enforcement powers that will allow them to take action to prosecute anyone who is without being registered or breaching condition/s of that registration. In addition, the new enforcement powers and tough penalties will act as a deterrent to those taking part in third-party sales, sending out a clear message that no such activities will be tolerated.



Chapter 4: How to Respond and When





Chapter 4: How to Respond and When Responses

You can respond to this consultation online by accessing the consultation at the following link:
<https://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 Animal.Welfare@daera-ni.gov.uk or telephoning 028 7744 2140.

Written responses should be sent to:

E-mail: Animal.Welfare@daera-ni.gov.uk

Postal address: Animal Welfare and Dog Control Policy Branch
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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 **25 August 2025**.



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 won't 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: <https://www.informationcommissioner.gov.uk/>).



Appendix 1: List of Consultees

This consultation document has been sent to statutory consultees and the following organisations:

- Association of Dogs and Cats Homes (ADCH)
- Association of Veterinary Surgeons Practising in Northern Ireland
- British Veterinary Association Northern Ireland
- Canine Breeders Northern Ireland
- DoneDeal
- Facebook
- Find your paws
- Freeads
- Friday-Ad
- Gumtree
- Naturewatch Foundation
- Northern Ireland Companion Animal Welfare Group (NICAWG)
 - Assisi Animal Sanctuary
 - Causeway Coast Dog Rescue
 - Cats Protection
 - Dogs Trust
 - Mid Antrim Animal Sanctuary
 - People's Dispensary for Sick Animals (PDSA)
 - Rainbow Rehoming Centre
 - Rosies Trust
 - Ulster Society for the Protection of Cruelty to Animals (USPCA)
- North Coast Cat Rescue
- Northern Ireland Veterinary Association
- Petify
- Pets4Homes
- Preloved
- The Kennel Club
- The Pet Advertising Advisory Group (PAAG)
- The Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE)
- VetNI



Appendix 2: Summary of Proposals

All persons seeking to:

- sell;
- give away; or
- otherwise transfer ownership

of a puppy or kitten (under six months old) will be required to apply to their local council to be entered onto the Register of Sellers and Suppliers of Puppies and Kittens. Registration will be valid for one year and will have conditions attached.

Applicants will be required to:

- pay a fee, which will be set by the council and will be nil for the first year (for any non-businesses)
- prove that they are the keeper of the mother of the puppies, by producing proof of a valid dog licence for the puppies' mother, or by producing proof of a valid licence to keep a dog breeding establishment or a petshop where the mother of the puppy is kept;
- declare that they are the keeper of the mother of the kittens; and
- comply with the conditions of registration.

Councils:

- will not be required to carry out an inspection;
- will have powers to suspend, vary or revoke a registration;
- will have powers to inspect an address; and
- will have powers to take samples from animals for traceability purposes.



Department of
**Agriculture, Environment
and Rural Affairs**

An Roinn

**Talmhaíochta, Comhshaoil
agus Gnóthaí Tuaithe**

Depairtment o'

**Fairmin, Environment
an' Kintra Matthers**

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