

Senedd Cymru  
Y Pwyllgor Newid Hinsawdd, Amgylchedd a  
Materion Gwledig  
Ymgynghoriad ar effaith argyfwng  
Covid-19  
CCERA(5) CP 20  
Ymateb gan Cartref Cŵn a Chathod Battersea

Welsh Parliament  
Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs  
Committee  
Consultation on the impact of the Covid-19  
pandemic  
CCERA(5) CP 20  
Evidence from Battersea Dogs and Cats Home



### About Battersea Dogs & Cats Home

Established in 1860 to care for abandoned animals, Battersea aims to never turn away a dog or cat in need of help. In 2019, Battersea directly helped over 5,000 animals, including 3,213 dogs and 2,476 cats, and ran both a direct grants programmes and an Academy which has provided best practice operational advice and support to rescue charities caring for animals in Wales, including Hope Rescue, Maesteg Animal Welfare Friends of Animals Wales, Greenacres, Greyhound Rescue Wales, Many Tears, North Clwyd Animal Rescue, and Fresh Fields; and across the globe. Battersea has supporters all over the UK and campaigns on behalf of cats and dogs. Click [here](#) for more information on Battersea's work.

Battersea not only works directly with Welsh rescues; it also engages directly in Welsh animal welfare policy to benefit dogs and cats in Wales. It does this through mechanisms such as responding to consultations, discussion with Welsh politicians and officials; and providing expertise to the Welsh Government through the Animal Welfare Network Wales (AWNW) and the Companion Animal Welfare Group Wales (CAWWG).

### Key statistics

- In 2019, we helped over 5,000 dogs and cats at our centres including 3,213 dogs and 2,476 cats.
- Battersea received 566 animals from other rescues last year, equivalent to 10% of total intake.
- We have an average of 247 dogs and 120 cats at any one time on site or foster.
- On average 8 dogs and 6 cats arrive at our three centres every day.
- In 2019 we reunited 528 animals with their owners.
- Our average stay is 34 days for dogs and 25 days for cats.
- Through the Battersea Academy we provide training and grants to Welsh rescues, with some recipients also receiving extra help through dedicated webinars during the lockdown period.

### Executive summary

- The animal welfare sector has been severely impacted financially and organisationally by COVID-19. These impacts will negatively affect rescues for years in the future.
- As a member of the Association of Dogs and Cats Homes (ADCH), Battersea helped co-ordinate ADCH's COVID-19 response. This included surveying ADCH members on the impact of COVID-19, including seven who solely operate in Wales.

- Organisations that operate solely in Wales have been particularly badly hit, with some uncertain they will be able to survive into 2021 and beyond.
- A reduction in the capacity of rescues has had a direct effect on animal welfare, making it harder for the sector to continue to deliver its vital public service
- This will become more challenging still over the winter, as impact on incomes of the impossibility of traditional fundraising streams such as events and charity shops through 2020 combines with an expected increase in animal relinquishment and a decrease in available homes, meaning more animals will need the sector's care for longer.

### **1. The scale and impact of the pandemic on your work and/or sector**

The animal welfare sector provides vital and irreplaceable services to prevent harm to animals, promote higher animal welfare standards and provide information and support to owners. As well as looking after the many animals under our care, charities are striving to continue operations in a safe and legal way given the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly admission of animals at risk of being abandoned, the emergency treatment of animals, and rehoming.

Battersea is a member of the Association of Dogs and Cats Homes (ADCH), the umbrella body for the UK's dog and cat rescues, and through the pandemic has been helping to co-ordinate the ADCH's response to the crisis. Our work has included surveying rescues across the UK, so we are well-placed to comment on issues and concerns emerging in the sector. There were 33 organisations that work in Wales that responded to this survey and seven that work exclusively in Wales.

These seven organisations that operate solely in Wales revealed:

- Only two organisations reported that they are confident they have financial reserves to continue operating into 2021 compared to over half of all survey respondents.
- That their incomes have on average declined by 80% during the crisis. This is a much more severe decline than respondents from across the UK, who expected an income reduction of 53%.
- All but one organisation has had to cancel fundraising events, including a centre which was planning a 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration.
- Organisations have found ways to help those affected by the crisis, by taking in animals from people who have been hospitalised or who have died, even when they have closed for non-emergency intake.

### **Financial pressure**

Rescues operating in Wales are showing a higher level of financial vulnerability than organisations in other jurisdictions. The COVID-19 outbreak is causing financial hardship for animal owners, businesses and charities, and is significantly harming the animal welfare sector's ability to raise funds. In 2020 and 2021, the sector is expecting significantly increased demand for our services, including more animals coming into our care, needing rehoming or veterinary treatment, while also facing severely reduced income. Many animal charities and rescue organisations may close in the coming months for economic reasons, placing additional pressures on those that continue operating and potentially also increasing pressure on Local Authorities, who are responsible for stray dogs. The responses to the

ADCH survey indicate that this will have a significant impact on the Welsh animal rescue sector.

Only two of the Welsh respondents to the survey are certain they can remain solvent into 2021. This is a much lower rate of financial viability than that of total UK respondents to the survey, 60% of whom said they will be solvent into 2021. Welsh organisations also show marked financial vulnerability when it comes to declining income. Whereas all survey respondents expected their income to be reduced by an average of 53% due to COVID-19, Welsh organisations predicted an income reduction of 80%. Six of the seven organisations have had to cancel fundraising events and all these organisations attribute declining income as the reason for this.

The key costs affecting their financial viability are salaries, rents, and veterinary bills. One organisation commented that they were afraid of having any major veterinary bills due to their current financial difficulties, highlighting the sensitivity of the situation.

Six have applied for emergency grants, including Welsh Government Business Support Grants, Welsh Government Small Charity Support Grant, Support Adoption for Pets, Business Rates, the Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA) Resilience Fund, Jean Sainsbury grants, the ADCH grant and Kennel Club grants. As yet there is no indication of how successful these applications have been, however we will be happy to share that with Welsh Government when it becomes available.

### **Organisational changes**

The largest of the seven Wales-only organisations has an estimated annual income of £850,000 and 25 staff, compared to an £10,000 annual income for the smallest. Only three of the seven Welsh organisations employ staff. These three organisations have furloughed some staff and stated that an extension to the furlough scheme would help them to continue operating until December.

On average, Wales-only respondents went from having 15 volunteers to just two supporting their work. Two organisations stated that this was in part because some volunteers have needed to shield due to their age or pre-existing health conditions. During the lockdown, **five of the seven organisations stopped taking in animals and four halted rehoming and community outreach programmes.** Five organisations reported that they had suffered reduced access to both essential and non-essential veterinary treatments at the time of the survey, including all but one having reduced access to neutering.

### **Future impact**

The impact of COVID-19 will continue to be felt even when most restrictions aimed at containing the virus have been relaxed. This is almost certainly a temporary shift and results from people being at home more with their pets - which will not remain the case. In the longer-term the viability and sustainability of many charities will be threatened given that many fixed costs cannot be reduced, while future shocks will also become more difficult to manage.

A loss of income is likely to continue long after COVID-19 restrictions are lifted, particularly if unemployment rises with the knock-on effect of a loss of donation income for charities. Demand for our services is expected to rise both during and after COVID-19 subsides given

the economic pressures facing the country. The demand will be directly related to the worsening economic situation with a likely increase in the abandonment of animals – which is a likely consequence of the significant increase in dog ownership which has been seen during lockdown - a sharp rise in demand for low-cost veterinary services and more unwanted litters of animals as veterinary practices continue to prioritise emergency care. This impact will be seen across 2020 and 2021 at the very least, with many charities already modelling negative cashflows over that period.

Battersea is concerned that a number of animal welfare charities in Wales could be forced to close and this will place further pressure on the remaining rescues and Local Authorities to step in and care for those animals, with each trying to manage in a tighter financial position than before. This is a significant risk given the small reserves and immense shock to cashflow as a result of constraints on fundraising activity.

If struggling animal welfare charities close, this will increase demand for the remaining charities in the short-term to look after the animals in their care, and in the mid-term to fill the gap in overall service provision. There are historical precedents for this. Following the 2008 banking crisis: the numbers of stray dogs rose by 30% in a three-year period (2009-2012) and between 2007 and 2009 Blue Cross saw a 27% rise in abandoned or stray cats.<sup>1</sup>

This period will also potentially increase the variability of costs, making future forecasting increasingly difficult. For rescue and rehoming organisations, more animals might require longer stays or need more expensive treatment. Additionally, the use of private boarding kennels and catteries may increase when intake has had to exceed capacity; particularly likely for smaller, volunteer-led rescues and those with small or rented premises that are more challenging to adapt.

## **2. How Welsh Government action to date has helped to combat the impact of the pandemic**

The Welsh Government has worked directly with the animal welfare sector. This has included meeting regularly with AWW and CAWGW to discuss and take forward work to safeguard animal welfare during the pandemic. The groups have worked to produce Welsh-specific advice and infographics for pet owners, rescue organisations and businesses on how to protect and promote animal welfare during the outbreak. This information was subsequently shared and promoted by the Welsh Government in both languages.

Emergency grants from the Welsh Government, such as Welsh Government Business Support Grant, Welsh Government Small Charity Support Grant, and the WCVA Resilience Fund, have offered much-needed financial support to the Welsh animal rescue sector at this time.

### **3. What further steps the Welsh Government should take**

All Wales-only organisations stated that quicker and easier access to grants was key in helping them to manage the crisis until the end of December. When considering grant eligibility for the animal welfare sector, the Welsh Government should acknowledge that the

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<sup>1</sup> Figures from Chief Executive Officers of Small Animal Charities data

sector directly and indirectly provides complementary services to public bodies by adding capacity and undertaking a range of statutory duties, either on behalf or in lieu of existing services. This helps to reduce the financial burden on public services.

Up to this point in the COVID-19 crisis, there has been a reduction in stray animals and abandonment to rescue organisations. Battersea's Lost Dogs and Cats Line reported a reduction of 71% in the reporting of stray dogs and cats for May 2020 compared with the same period last year. This is however an illusory picture emanating from both the perception some will have held that intake was suspended and because owners were at home for an unusual amount of time.

At the same time, Battersea research shows that in February there was an average of 725,160 online searches to buy a dog which increased to 1,574,380 in April, a 217% rise. With this large increase in the demand for dogs, all charities are expecting a surge of relinquishment in the later months of 2020 when owners return to work and can no longer care for their pets. It is imperative that Welsh Government continues to communicate with ADCH and with the rescue sector in Wales to ensure that their needs are not overlooked as this phase of the crisis builds, and the increased demand for their services can be met.

The provision of animal welfare services by the rescue sector comes at no cost to the public purse as organisations are typically funded by charitable giving. Nevertheless, the social and health risks for society if we failed to carry out our work would be considerable. This workload has of course been forced to adapt during the pandemic but has been no less intense.

### **4. Any other areas within our remit you wish to draw to our attention**

The COVID-19 pandemic has negatively affected animal welfare, with a sharp increase in the number of animals advertised for sale and demand increasing, a lack of access to non-emergency veterinary care - including microchipping and neutering - and the inability for proper socialisation of pets which may lead to long-term behavioural issues.

#### **Pet sales and imports**

Battersea is concerned to see increasing numbers of people getting pets during lockdown, as many of these pets will have been acquired from unscrupulous places for vastly inflated prices. Despite lockdown, there remains a high number of puppies available to buy online with over 400 adverts placed daily. The market for puppies remains strong, with prices for popular breeds like French Bulldogs prices rising over 40% from an average of £1,750 in 2018 to prices averaging £2,500 in June 2020.<sup>2</sup>

Responsible breeders only cater for a small proportion of the market. At a time when less rehoming can take place and demand is so high, many animals are being bought online without owners fully considering long-term costs or commitments, and without veterinary support in the form of advice, vaccinations, neutering, microchipping, flea or worm treatments, socialisation and habituation. The scale of this problem is yet unknown but based on the sharp increase in adverts and searches for puppies for sale - an increase of

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<sup>2</sup> Figures from Blue Cross

217% in three months according to Battersea research of interest searches - it could be vast.

Internet sales drive the illegal puppy trade, with many of the puppies bred on puppy farms sold to new owners that are often oblivious to their origin. There is no doubt from official figures that the puppy importation is continuing during the pandemic – the number of Intra-Trade Animal Health Certificates issued for May 2020 was 43% greater than May 2019, clearly indicating that animals are still coming into the UK for sale.<sup>3</sup>

Brexit provides an opportunity to greatly restrict low-welfare dog and cat imports as additional conditions can be added to target this issue specifically. Poorly-bred and sick dogs and cats are being commercially imported from overseas to satisfy a UK market hungry for puppies, kittens, and designer breeds. Underage puppies removed from their mothers too young and smuggled into the UK are often transported from Europe in horrendous, cramped, unsafe conditions for days at a time by dealers who have no regard for their health or welfare.

Amending the wait time between rabies vaccinations and when a dog can enter the UK would reduce puppy smuggling whilst protecting public health. To control infection, the vaccination should only be given at 12 weeks. In addition, the post-vaccination wait period for dogs to travel to the UK should be extended to at least 12 weeks, meaning that imported puppies will be banned from entering the UK until they are around six months old. This will bring a myriad of benefits including reduced disease risk, easier checks at the border, and significant commercial disadvantage to illegal and low-welfare puppy importers, who will be required to keep puppies for longer and sell them when they are less commercially desirable. The Welsh Government should impress upon the Westminster Government the desirability of this change, which would significantly improve animal welfare in Wales and make border protection more achievable.

Better enforcement of border control checks is vital to help us more effectively monitor the animals that are entering the UK. There needs to be more vigorous checking at ports and stricter penalties for people caught importing and selling puppies illegally and Battersea supports EU moves to adopt compulsory dog microchipping in all Member States. Battersea encourages the Welsh Government to press the UK Government to support these improvements for the sake of the health and wellbeing of Welsh companion animals.

### **Veterinary delays**

The ADCH survey shows that there have been delays to non-urgent and emergency and preventative veterinary treatment during the lockdown period, including vaccinations and neutering. Additionally, owners may not access veterinary care due to pressures on their income or travel restrictions during lockdown. In the medium-term, we expect larger numbers of animals needing rehoming due to reduced microchipping rates - the primary way of identifying a dog's keeper (although microchipping is a legal requirement for dogs, it

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-06-01/52515/>

has not been considered an essential service during lockdown so rates will have declined), and unwanted litters from unneutered females.

For cats the lack of neutering could lead to higher numbers of unwanted litters, particularly during kitten season. It is difficult to predict how many more kittens may be born due to the lockdown restrictions, however last year six of the leading cat welfare charities neutered a total of 216,261 cats. Cats Protection had 1,210 downloads of its advice pages on pregnant cats, birth and caring for kittens between April and June this year compared to 114 for the same period in 2019.

### **Animal cruelty**

With the reported rise in cases of domestic abuse during lockdown,<sup>4</sup> research from The Links Group indicates that there could be an associated rise in the instances of pets being abused too.<sup>5</sup> Several organisations responding to the ADCH survey reported that their work on domestic violence related cases had increased since the beginning of lockdown. Dogs Trust's Freedom Project has seen a significant increase to its website page 'Accessing our Service' with a 319% increase in visits, compared to the same period in 2019.<sup>6</sup>

COVID-19 has resulted in delays to animal cruelty legislation. A Bill to increase the maximum sentence for animal cruelty was introduced in the Westminster Parliament (which will apply in Wales through a Legislative Consent Motion) in February and was originally scheduled for a Second Reading in June with the expectation that it would reach the Report Stage before the summer recess. However, the Second Reading has now been delayed to 23 October. This is not the first time a Bill has been introduced; a previous version fell due to the general election. Legislative delays in Westminster are therefore already impacting on Welsh animal cruelty legislation. Despite the challenges of this year, Scotland has managed to pass its equivalent legislation in the summer.

### **Recommendations**

To ensure Welsh animal rescues can continue to provide care for animals and support for communities, the sector is calling on the Welsh Government to provide support through targeted interventions:

- **Investment and grants:** Target investment for small, medium and large charities to ensure critical capacity is sustained in the sector so that animals and their owners can be supported both during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Work with the sector:** Ensure animal welfare organisations, particularly those who operate exclusively in Wales, are included in discussions on the Welsh Government's response to COVID-19.
- **Clarify volunteer guidance:** including guidance on which employer rules apply to volunteers.
- **Pending legislation:** Continue work on legislating third-party puppy and kitten sales and taking forward the recommendations of the Welsh breeding review by the Wales Animal Health and Welfare Framework Group, including new bespoke legislation. Apply pressure on the Westminster Parliament to expedite legislation on five-year maximum sentences for animal cruelty; and to increase the wait times post-rabies vaccination for all imports so that animals under the age of six months are not being routinely imported.

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<sup>4</sup><https://www.lse.ac.uk/News/Latest-news-from-LSE/2020/g-July-20/Big-rise-in-domestic-abuse-calls-during-lockdown>

<sup>5</sup><https://thelinksgroup.org.uk/>

<sup>6</sup><https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/2143/html/>