

Steps to further improve animal welfare of pets unveiled

Wales has led the way on measures to improve the standard of animal health and welfare and has introduced a number of pieces of legislation in recent years, including a welfare-focused licensing scheme for licensed breeders; the requirement for dogs to be microchipped; and bans brought in on the use of electronic shock collars and the cosmetic docking of dogs' tails.

To further improve welfare standards for puppies in Wales, the Cabinet Secretary has confirmed her intention to build on the improvements made since the Animal Welfare (Breeding of Dogs) (Wales) Regulations 2014 were introduced by investigating the potential banning of third party sales. Officials will now look at options to take this forward.

Speaking in plenary, the Cabinet Secretary also confirmed a review of the microchipping Regulations will take place to include research into the levels of compliance and enforcement.

Consideration will be given to whether there is a benefit in extending the Regulations to include other species, including cats.

Under the Animal Welfare Act 2006, there is a duty of care on all owners and keepers of animals to ensure their welfare needs are met, including the costs associated with owning a pet. However, people's circumstances can change.

Work will get underway to explore what veterinary provision, assistance and advice is available to people who need help in caring for their pets, possibly at times of illness or emergency, such as fleeing from a violent household.

Revised Codes of Practice for horses and dogs will be published before summer recess and a consultation on the revised Cat Code will commence in the autumn.

The Rabbit Code will be reviewed and work will start on identifying if there's a need to introduce any new Codes, such as for primates and other exotic pets, or racing greyhounds.

In 2016, RSPCA Cymru made a case for the introduction of an Animal Offender Register in Wales and a Task and Finish Group was established to consider the evidence. The draft final report states that due to the absence of practical solutions which would enable the creation of such a register, and the lack of UK-based evidence to support the impact that some stakeholders believe one would have, the Group does not recommend the development of a register at this time. The Cabinet Secretary will receive the final report before the Summer Recess.

The Cabinet Secretary has also asked RSPCA Cymru to provide evidence about whether the recommendation in the 2014 Wooller Report that the RSPCA

Inspectorate receives statutory status under the Animal Welfare Act 2006 is workable in Wales.

Cabinet Secretary said:

“As a Government, animal welfare is a priority for us. In Wales, we pride ourselves on having excellent animal welfare standards and expect everyone to reflect this by being responsible owners.

“We have introduced a number of pieces of legislation in recent years which underlines our commitment to continue improving standards of animal health and welfare in Wales.

“In Wales, we demand high standards from our licensed breeders and sourcing a healthy puppy which can be seen with its mother, or rehoming an animal from a reputable Animal Welfare Establishment, is the first, fundamental step towards being a responsible owner. Yet the illegal importation of puppies, driven by huge demand, continues to be a problem.

“I believe the potential banning of third party sales is worthy of investigation and I will be discussing options with officials to take this forward.

“I am today announcing a range of measures to help us build on our success to date. This includes a review of our Microchipping Regulations, support for owners whose circumstances change and the publication of updated and new Codes of Practice.

“Embedding a culture of responsible ownership cannot be achieved in isolation and I am grateful for the dedication and passion shown towards animals in Wales. There is always more that can be done but we are proud, as a nation, to be leading the way in raising standards of animal welfare.”

[Vote on introduction of ban on microbeads to take place](#)

The proposed ban will apply to the supply and manufacture of ‘rinse-off’ personal care products which contain plastic microbeads.

Plastic microbeads are a common ingredient in many hand cleansers, face scrubs, toothpastes, shower gels, cosmetics and other personal care products. When washed down the drain, they are too small to be filtered out in sewage treatment systems, so a proportion enter the marine environment, causing harm

to marine life.

Last month, the Welsh Government tabled the Environmental Protection (Microbeads) (Wales) Regulations 2018. If voted through the Senedd today, the ban will make it an offence to manufacture any rinse-off personal care products which contain plastic microbeads. It will also be an offence to supply rinse-off personal care products which contain microbeads.

If agreed following today's vote, the ban will come into force on 30 June.

The Minister for Environment, Hannah Blythyn, said:

"Microbeads in rinse-off products are unnecessary and harmful to sea life. A ban will reduce pollutants from entering our seas and is an important step to safeguarding our marine environment.

"This ban is part of a range of measures here in Wales to reduce waste, tackle plastic pollution and increase recycling. For example, our local authority targets for household recycling mean we recycle 75% of plastic bottles collected from households, compared with 57% across the whole of the UK.

"2018 is Wales' Year Of The Sea and we're taking action to tackle plastic pollution, including signing up to the UN Clean Seas pledge earlier this month. We're also developing water refill points at key communities along our Wales Coast Path, helping reduce further the amount of plastic entering our seas."

Registered Social Landlords Bill gains Royal Assent

Minister for Housing and Regeneration, Rebecca Evans, who attended the sealing ceremony at the Welsh Government offices in Cathays Park, said:

"Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) play a vital role in helping us to meet our commitment to create 20,000 new affordable homes by 2021. They, in turn, require the sector to continue to have the freedom to use private sector borrowing to supplement the Welsh Government's social housing grant and other funding programmes.

"This Act will help secure much needed affordable homes and more options for Welsh Government to maximise the positive contributions RSLs make to the communities in which they work. It also provides certainty for private sector partners who have made long term

commitments to funding an independent RSL sector.

Stuart Ropke, Chief Executive of Community Housing Cymru, said:

“We are pleased that Welsh Government has acted decisively to pass this legislation to ensure the independence of housing associations in Wales. The Act will ensure that housing associations can continue to attract private investment and build the affordable homes Wales needs as we work towards the target of 20,000 affordable homes in this Assembly term.”

The Act amends and removes powers which are deemed by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) to demonstrate central and local government control over Registered Social Landlords (RSLs). It also introduces new powers to reduce local authority influence on RSL Boards.

Without reclassification back to private sector organisations, funding for RSLs to build and improve social housing would have to compete with other Welsh Government capital project priorities.

Autism services in Wales improving

In 2016, the Welsh Government published a new Autistic Spectrum Disorder Strategic Action Plan, backed by a £13m investment in new Integrated Autism services across Wales.

The first annual report on the delivery of the Action Plan is being published today, and sets out what has been achieved during the last year.

Achievements include:

- Improving services – The establishment of a National Integrated Autism service is creating consistent support for autistic people across Wales. Services are already operating in Cardiff and Vale, Cwm Taf, Gwent and Powys, it will be launched in North Wales next week and will be operational in Western Bay and West Wales later this year.
- Improving waiting times for assessment – Since 2015 the Welsh Government has invested an additional £2m a year in children’s neurodevelopmental services. In November 2017, a new 26 week waiting time standard from referral to first assessment appointment was introduced, which is now being piloted.
- Raising awareness – The extension of the Learning with Autism programme. In addition to the primary schools scheme, the secondary school and early years schemes have been launched and are being rolled out. 80 schools have now completed the primary school programme, with nearly

13,000 children becoming autism super heroes. The Can You See me campaign is also being delivered, aimed at improving awareness of autism in local communities. The campaign film and resources are being rolled out in partnership with local parents, carers and businesses across Wales.

Health and Social Services Secretary, Vaughan Gething said:

“I’m pleased with the real progress we’ve made this year to improve services for people with autism. We are raising awareness of autism across services, improving access to assessment and diagnosis and putting in place additional specialist support in every region.

“Although we are making good progress we know there is still much more to do and we continue to look carefully at the issues which autistic people say matter most to them to inform future action.”

To further support service improvement, Ministers intend to highlight the needs of autistic people across statutory services by introducing a Code of Practice on the Delivery of Autism Services, which is being developed in partnership with autistic people. It will provide clarity on the support autistic people can expect to receive and will provide guidance on how services can adapt their practice to meet the individual needs of autistic people.

The Health Secretary added:

“Over this Assembly term we want to focus all our efforts on delivering the ASD Strategic Action Plan, embedding the new integrated service, and delivering on all our other commitments.

“We are already delivering much needed improvements in autism services and I am convinced that costly and resource intensive legislation will not bring any additional benefits for autistic people. It must be much better to invest time and money in ensuring we deliver on our firm commitments and to ensure there is a focus on continuous improvement as the new services we are putting in place become established.

“The calls for improvement in autism services are not falling on deaf ears, we are taking action to achieve the outcomes everyone wants to see. We will continue to listen and I will keep an open mind on the need for autism specific legislation in the future, if it becomes clear through evaluation that the improvements we all want to see can only be delivered by taking this route.”

Major landmark reached as 100 projects completed through the 21st Century Schools and Education Programme

Education Secretary, Kirsty Williams, announced today that the programme has reached a major milestone with the completion of the 100th project in Band A, the first wave of investment.

The Education Secretary was speaking at the inaugural Education Buildings Wales conference which is being held at Cardiff University.

With a further 63 schemes under construction or approved to proceed, Band A is already on target to significantly surpass its target of 150 schools and colleges to be rebuilt or refurbished.

This represents an investment of £1.4 billion in education infrastructure across Wales and has encompassed a wide variety of schemes catering for the different needs of all learners and communities.

Kirsty Williams said:

“From impressive new college campuses in Cardiff and Aberdare to brand new schools accommodating pupils aged 3-16 in Llandysul and Holywell, our 21st Century Schools and Education Programme continues to deliver for learners across the length and breadth of Wales.

“The Programme represents the largest investment in our schools and colleges since the 1960s. Investing alongside local authorities and further education colleges, we have been able to create buildings that meet the needs of learners, teachers and the wider community and offer the kind of facilities that are truly befitting of the 21st Century.

“But we’re not stopping there. Band B of the Programme will begin in April 2019 and will be even more ambitious, investing a further £2.3 billion.

“We will continue to make sure that we have the right size schools and colleges, in the right location; well-designed, safe and energy-efficient buildings that provide enough places to deliver Welsh and English medium education and that represent good value for money.

“I am proud to celebrate this achievement and look forward to the good news continuing as we move into the second phase of the Programme.”