



**Mid & East  
Antrim**  
Borough Council

June 12th, 2026

**NOTICE OF MEETING**

You are requested to attend a meeting of the

Mid and East Antrim Neighbourhoods and Communities Committee

to be held on **Tuesday, 16th June 2026 at 6:30 pm** in **Council Chamber, The Braid, 1-29 Bridge Street, Ballymena** and via remote access..

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Valerie Watts".

Valerie Watts  
Interim Chief Executive, Mid and East Antrim Borough Council

# Agenda

## 1 NOTICE OF MEETING

## 2 APOLOGIES

## 3 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Members and Officers were invited to declare any pecuniary and non-pecuniary interests, including gifts and hospitality, they may have in respect of items on this Agenda.

## 4 ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION / DECISION

### 4.1 Consultation response on Animal Welfare Policy Reform Proposals - Circulated

*Attachment: Animal Welfare Reform Consultation.pdf* *Page 1*

*Attachment: Appendix 1 Consultation response on Animal Welfare Reforms Final.pdf* *Page 5*

*Attachment: Appendix 2- Letter DAERA Consultation Animal Welfare Policy Reforms in NI May 2026.pdf* *Page 26*

*Attachment: Appendix 3- Proposed Animal Welfare Policy Reforms.pdf* *Page 28*

*Attachment: Appendix 4- Impact Assessments - Equality & Disability Screening Inflationary Increase Dog Licences\_Redacted.pdf* *Page 61*

*Attachment: Appendix 5- Impact Assessments -Equality & Disability Screening Strengthening Microchipping Requirements\_Redacted.pdf* *Page 123*

*Attachment: Appendix 6-Impact Assessments - Equality & Disability Screening Regulation Rescue & Rehoming Orgs\_Redacted.pdf* *Page 196*

*Attachment: Appendix 7- Impact Assessments - Equality & Disability Screening Ban Specific Aversive Training devices\_Redacted.pdf* *Page 267*

### 4.2 Tobacco and Vapes Act 2026 - Circulated

<https://www.stopsmokingni.info/>

<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/tobacco-and-vapes-act-documents>

*Attachment: Tobacco and Vapes Act 2026 Final.pdf* *Page 340*

### 4.3 Registration of Skin Piercing Businesses - Circulated

*Attachment: Skin Piercing Registrations Report.pdf*

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## 5 ITEMS FOR RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL

## 6 TABLED QUESTIONS

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*Closed Committee - In accordance with Council policy, representatives of the Press will not be in attendance for this section of the Meeting.*

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## 7 ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION / DECISION – CLOSED COMMITTEE

### 7.1 Business Case Approval – Play Park Investment 2026/27 – Castleview Play Park, Whitehead - Circulated

*Attachment: Castleview Play Park Business Case Approval.pdf*

*Not included*

*Attachment: Appendix 1 Business Case - Play Investment 202627 - Castleview Play  
Park 080626\_Redacted.pdf*

*Not included*

### 7.2 Reset and Recovery – Update and Procurement of a Strategic Partner - Circulated

*Attachment: Reset Cohesion Update.pdf*

*Not included*

## 8 ITEMS FOR RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL – CLOSED COMMITTEE

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*Open Committee*

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## 9 FORWARD PLAN FOR NEIGHBOURHOODS AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE - Circulated

*Attachment: NC Committee - Forward Plan June meeting.pdf*

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|----------------------------|---|
| <b>Council/Committee:</b>  | <b>Neighbourhood &amp; Communities</b>                          |
| <b>Date:</b>               | 16 June 2026  |
| <b>Report Title:</b>       | Consultation response on Animal Welfare Policy Reform Proposals |
| <b>Publication Status:</b> | Open  |
| <b>Author:</b>             | Clement Kennedy, Environmental Health Manager                   |
| <b>Approver:</b>           | Matt McDowell, Director of People                               |

## 1. Purpose

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to advise Elected Members that DAERA has launched a public consultation on proposed reforms to animal welfare policy in Northern Ireland. The consultation was launched on the 5 May 2026 and closes on the 30 June 2026.

## 2. Background

- 2.1. DAERA is seeking views on a number of proposed measures aimed at strengthening animal welfare protections for companion animals, 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.
- 2.2. In addition to the above, the consultation also includes a call for evidence, to inform future decisions around the mandatory microchipping of pet cats.
- 2.3. 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).
- 2.4. 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.
- 2.5. Collectively through Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE), Councils continue to raise their concerns of the financial and resource implications of implementation of new legislation.

### **3. Key Issues for Consideration**

#### **3.1. Regulation of Rescue and Rehoming Organisation**

The consultation proposes a significant expansion of local council responsibilities, whereby councils become the primary enforcement and regulatory authority for rescue and rehoming organisations. This includes:

- **Mandatory Licensing:** All rescue and rehoming organisations would be legally required to obtain a licence to operate.
- **Compliance with Standards:** Licensed organisations would need to meet defined minimum animal welfare standards and adhere to specific licence conditions.
- **Public Register:** Councils would be responsible for maintaining a public register of licensed organisations, improving transparency and accountability.
- **Enforcement Role:** Councils would oversee compliance, investigate breaches, and take enforcement action where necessary.

#### **3.2 Dog Licence Fees**

The Department proposes an inflationary increase in dog licence fees, which have remained unchanged since 2011. It is anticipated that the higher fees will enable councils to allocate additional resources to dog control services, delivering improved outcomes for both dog owners and the wider community.

#### **3.3 Aversive training devices**

The Department proposes to prohibit the use of handheld e-collars, choke collars and prong collars for cats and dogs in Northern Ireland, on the basis that these aversive training devices carry a high risk of misuse and can cause direct harm to animal welfare.

#### **3.4 Strengthening Microchip Requirements for Dogs**

The Department proposes to introduce stricter microchipping requirements by making it an offence for dog owners to fail to update ownership details on microchip databases, requiring individuals to declare if they are the breeder of the dog, and mandating that all dogs are microchipped by eight weeks of age.

### **3.5 Call for Evidence on microchipping of Pet Cats**

The Department is seeking views, evidence, and information on whether the mandatory microchipping of owned pet cats should be introduced in Northern Ireland.

### **3.6 Consultation**

The public consultation was launched on 5 May and will close on 30 June 2026. The proposals reflect a growing concern that central government is increasingly devolving enforcement responsibilities to local councils without providing the necessary resources, powers, or legal safeguards to support delivery.

Elected Members will recall the recent successful legal challenge regarding the withdrawal of departmental funding for the Animal Welfare Service. As a result, these costs continue to be borne by ratepayers, with no assurance of future financial support being made available to councils.

## **4. General Considerations / Implications**

- 4.1. Financial implications:  
Councils have significant concerns around the financial and resource implications of the proposals associated with regulation of rescue and rehoming organisations and additional enforcement associated with banning aversive training devices and microchipping.
- 4.2. Human Resources:  
Potential additional resources will be required.
- 4.3. Equality Screening: Any equality implications will be identified using the Council's screening process. Several DAERA Equality & Disability screenings are attached to the Appendices.
- 4.4. Assets: no direct asset impact
- 4.5. Alignment with Corporate Priorities and Link to Corporate Plan: aligned with corporate objectives
- 4.6. Rural Proofing and Environmental Impact: any rural needs implications will be identified using the Council's screening process.

## **5 Proposed Way Forward**

- 5.1 Officers from Mid and East Antrim Borough Council will continue to work with DAERA in relation to Animal Welfare Policy reforms.

## **6 Recommendation or Decision**

- 6.1 Elected Members are asked to approve the draft consultation response attached in Appendix 1

## **7 Appendices / Link**

- Appendix 1 - MEABC Consultation response
- Appendix 2 – Letter DAERA Consultation Animal Welfare Reforms
- Appendix 3 – Proposed Animal Welfare Reforms
- Appendix 4 – Equality & Disability Screening Increase Dog Licencing
- Appendix 5 – Equality & Disability Screening Microchipping
- Appendix 6 – Equality & Disability Screening Rescue & Rehoming Organisations
- Appendix 7 – Equality & Disability Screening Aversive Training Devices

## Consultation on Proposed Animal Welfare Policy Reforms in Northern Ireland

### Written Response Template

#### Q1. What is your name?

[Mid and East Antrim Borough Council](#)

#### Q2. What is your email address?

[MEA.envhealth@midandeantrim.gov.uk](mailto:MEA.envhealth@midandeantrim.gov.uk)

#### Q3. Are the views and opinions in your response personal or expressed on behalf of an organisation?

[Organisation](#)

If the views and opinions expressed are on behalf of an organisation, please provide the name of the organisation below.

[Mid and East Antrim Borough Council](#)

#### Q4. Please indicate if you are happy for your response to be published.

[Yes](#)

#### 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.

[Yes](#)

### 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?

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. Councils 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 reduction in rehoming capacity and reduce administrative and enforcement burden for enforcing authority.

Councils agree in principle with regulation of the sector, however it is our view the proposed regulation closely aligns with DAERA current licensing functions of establishments such as licensing of zoos, pet shops, boarding kennels.

Councils are not in favour of becoming the enforcing authority. There is a strong case for the regulation of this sector by DAERA. Alignment would:

- Promote consistency and clarity for operators and the public
- Allow use of existing processes and expertise
- Reduce administrative burden
- 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 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. Councils strongly believe it is advantageous for the presence of 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 unlicensed medication. A similar recommendation for veterinary oversight was recently made by the Expert Advisory Panel following review of dog breeding establishment regulation.

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 should the Department continue with the assumed position that Councils will become the registration authority.

Council wishes to remind DAERA that there were previous agreed positions between Councils and DAERA during the consultation and implementation phase leading up to the Welfare of Animals Act (NI) 2011 which did not include adding additional responsibilities upon Councils in the future.

This Council is already operating the existing Animal Welfare service in a financial constrained environment following the withdrawal of recurrent and agreed funding by DAERA in August 2023.

Mid and East Antrim Borough Council requires 3 Animal Welfare Officers (AWOs), 1 Animal Welfare Manager and 1 Administrative Assistant to serve the 3 Councils in the Northern Region i.e. Mid and East Antrim Borough Council, Causeway Coast & Glens Council and Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council. This team of staff are fully employed fulfilling current duties operating in a prioritised and financial constrained manner.

The Council's Dog Control Service has 5 FTE staff covering the Borough – also fully employed fulfilling their current duties which has recently been extended to an additional category of dangerous dogs which has been challenging and complex. DAERA recently introduced the XL Bully legislation which has already significantly added to the workload of Council Dog Control teams, again 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?

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 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. Councils 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 reduction in rehoming capacity and reduce administrative and enforcement burden for enforcing authority.

Councils 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
- 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
- Thresholds for when licensing applies (number of animals, frequency, etc.)
- Whether volunteer foster carers require individual approval or registration
- The extent to which domestic premises must comply with commercial-style standards
- Treatment of independent individuals rehoming animals informally not part of an organisation

Council reiterates that whilst the Council welcomes actions to improve animal welfare, Mid and East Antrim Borough Council **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 closely aligns with DAERA current licensing functions of establishments such as licensing of zoos, pet shops, boarding kennels.

Councils are not in favour of becoming the enforcing authority. There is a strong case for the regulation of this sector by DAERA. Alignment would:

- Promote consistency and clarity for operators and the public
- Allow use of existing processes and expertise
- Reduce administrative burden
- 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 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. Councils strongly believe it is advantageous for the presence of 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 unlicensed medication. A similar recommendation for veterinary oversight was recently made by the Expert Advisory Panel following review of dog breeding establishment regulation.

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 should the Department continue with the assumed position that Councils will become the registration authority.

Council wishes to remind DAERA that there were previous agreed positions between Councils and DAERA during the consultation and implementation phase leading up to the Welfare of Animals Act (NI) 2011 which did not include adding additional responsibilities upon Councils in the future.

This Council is already operating the existing Animal welfare service in a financial constrained environment following the withdrawal of recurrent and agreed funding by DAERA in August 2023

Mid and East Antrim Borough Council requires 3 Animal Welfare Officers (AWOs), 1 Animal Welfare Manager and 1 Administrative Assistant to serve the 3 Councils in the Northern Region i.e Mid and East Antrim Borough Council , Causeway Coast & Glens Council and Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council. This team of staff are fully employed fulfilling current duties operating in a prioritised and financial constrained manner.

The Council's Dog Control Service has 5 FTE staff covering the Borough – also fully employed fulfilling their current duties which has recently been extended to an additional category of dangerous dogs which has been challenging and complex. DAERA recently introduced the XL Bully legislation which has already significantly added to the workload of Council Dog Control teams, again 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?**

Yes

##### **Comments**

Council reiterates that whilst the Council welcomes actions to improve animal welfare, Mid and East Antrim Borough Council does **not agree that Councils should be allocated responsibility for the licensing and enforcement of rescue and rehoming organisations.**

As general welfare principles Council supports the proposed licence conditions of re in principal, the following comments should be duly considered:

GENERAL -Display of licence – Agree

RECORD KEEPING -5 year retention – Agree

ANNUAL VETERINARY VISIT – the provides strong welfare safeguard- Agree

ANIMAL NUMBERS -the term “*must not exceed maximum that is reasonable*” is subjective and open to interpretation, creates risk of inconsistent enforcement and uncertainty for operators, suggest clear assessment criteria or indicative thresholds. – Agree

STAFFING-the emphasis on competence and training is welcomed, although it is recognised that some organisations may struggle with formal training polices and cost of gaining qualifications – Agree

ENVIRONMENT -the licencing requirement assumes a purpose-built managed facility, smaller run organisations may find difficult to provide isolations facilities, and signage requirements – Agree

DIET – Generally proportionate and positive – Agree

ENRICHMENT, HANDLING etc - Generally proportionate and positive – Agree

REHOMING- welcome the transparency in advertising and information to adopters – agree

WILDLIFE – the term “*if the release area is suitable for the species;*”- is open to interpretation, suggest clear guidance is provided. - Agree

The licensing conditions should clearly define ‘establishment’”, whether a single premises based model or if includes foster network.

Councils note only 9 out of the approx. 68 identified rescue and rehoming centres are ADCH Members, therefore we would dispute DAERA assumption that many already meet Minimum Welfare and Operation Standards. We anticipate many organisations will be impacted by the licencing requirements, and a high level of non-compliance once regime is introduced.

The proposed licence conditions, while 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 competency to assess welfare 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?

Yes

#### 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 should the Department continue with the assumed position that Councils will become the registration authority.

Council believes therefore that any of the assumptions made on cost to the ratepayer which are based on the regulatory impact assessment are flawed and do not accurately address the potential budgetary implications.

Impact assessments significantly underestimate the time, staffing, training, and compliance costs for both organisations and councils; inspection and licensing are expected to require significant officer time. 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.

Council would not be able to deliver the proposed enforcement regime using existing expertise within current resources.

The proposals will place substantial additional demands on councils, particularly on Animal Welfare Officers (AWOs) and dog control services. Current Officers are not fully equipped to deliver a new licensing regime of this nature.

#### 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
- Workforce restructuring

This has not been fully accounted for in the impact assessment

Councils also highlight the real concern for perception of conflict of interest of regulating a sector which councils rely heavily on for the rehoming of stray and unwanted dogs.

A 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

**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?**

Yes

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 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?

Yes

#### Comments

Council broadly supports the proposed inflationary increases but notes the marginal increase in income still falls short of full cost recovery.

Dog licence income does not cover 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 decision to own a dog, aligning with the aim of promoting responsible dog ownership

The proposed inflationary increases provide a modest rise in income and does not meet growing service demands, including enforcement linked to XL Bully legislation and proposed additional statutory responsibilities regarding puppies and kittens, dog breeding establishments.

Th majority of licences are not full fee this limits the ability for councils to close significant funding gap. There is risk that costs will continue to rise. Council capability to improve enforcement , achieve greater dog control compliance and public safety outcomes is limited based on modest increase.

Through NIDAG, Councils have provided the Department with evidence of reflective cost of dog control services, including forecasting income estimates informed by Ulster University research.

Around 70% of dog licences are concessionary licences 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.

Whilst Councils consider a much greater increase in fees without concessionary discounts, would provide more meaningful cost recovery, it is acknowledged in the challenging financial climate this is may discourage owners from licensing their animal and may lead to increased non-compliance

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 retaining a concessionary element, Councils would favour a higher fee ,including a review of the award criteria. Retention of a reduced fee for dogs

that have been neutered/sterilised is preferred, as an incentive to promote responsible dog ownership, ultimately reducing the number of unwanted dogs. Councils also suggest nominal fee for current free licences which are often greatest proportion of licences

Consideration should be given to introducing a small administrative fee for all licences, including those currently issued free to over 65s (e.g. £2)

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?**

Yes

Comments

The proposed inflationary increases would provide only a modest rise in income and does 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:

- Approximately 25% of licences are issued free of charge
- Around 70% are 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?**

No

## **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?**

Yes

Comments

While councils strongly support that the use of handheld remote controlled electric shock collars (e-collars) on dogs and cats be banned, it is felt that further effective enforcement could include powers to seize devices, restrict sales and use of Fixed penalty notices

**Q15. Do you agree that the use of choke collars on dogs and cats should be banned?**

Yes

Comments

Council is fully supportive of a ban on the use of choke collars on dogs and cats. It is however acknowledged that there may be some very specific scenarios where use of an aversive collar might be considered, for example in preventing life threatening behaviour. Should any exemption be considered for bodies such as the Ministry of Defence, PSNI etc, use should only be permitted in prescribed circumstances, and in accordance with strict operational protocols. It is felt that further effective enforcement could include powers to seize devices, restrict sales and use of Fixed penalty notices

**Q16. Do you agree that the use of prong collars on dogs and cats should be banned?**

Yes

Comments

Councils fully support ban on the use of these types of collars, due to the established risk of tracheal compression, thyroid damage, ocular pressure and spinal injury.

Council agree with the Department's proposal that electronic containment fences and spray collars would not be banned and acknowledge that these present a lower risk of deliberate misuse or direct harm than e-collars, choke collars and prong collars.

## **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?**

Yes

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 allowing Fixed Penalty Notices for offences. The absence of powers to seize devices used unlawfully would also hinder enforcement and make it less proportionate than other dog control measures. In addition, without a ban on the sale of aversive training devices, officers may find the proposed restrictions difficult to enforce in practice.

**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?**

No

**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?**

Yes

We see no role for Councils in enforcing any such 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, result in inconsistent, disproportionate, costly enforcement action for relatively minor offence in absence of any fixed penalty notice

NIDAG have informed DAERA in 2023 and more recently in 2025, Council officer views for regulation of microchip database providers, to facilitate a smaller number, centrally operated and available in one search location.

NIDAG called for the exploration of 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?**

Yes

Comments

Council have no objection to this requirement; however, we would see no role for Councils in enforcing it. It is our view, 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 database will assist improve traceability but only if the breeder information has also been recorded and remains a 'secondary contact. This could facilitate councils tracing back to potential unlicensed breeders and inform targeted interventions.

**Q21. Do you agree that all dogs should be microchipped before they are older than eight weeks?**

Yes

Comments

Council have no objection to this requirement: however, we see no role for enforcement. Councils already require and record microchip details as part of 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?

Yes

Comments

Council see no role for enforcement.

Should the Department consider the council as enforcing such requirements, there will be significant financial and resource impact on councils to enforce compliance in relation to estimated 180, 000 un-microchipped dogs in NI.

The Regulatory Impact Assessment 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 notice option and the exception of 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 fine, does not align with enforcement response to other more significant dog control offences

Councils stress that that RIA is not robust from a council service delivery perspective and does not quantify council enforcement burdens despite the major operational implications, for example,

The need to check compliance at 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 capacity, both administrative and enforcement roles.

The regulatory impact assessment also fails to account for public engagement, increased reporting and initial surge in activity.

This adds to the growing trend of additional new enforcement duties without additional funding or mechanism to recover costs.

While the Council supports the objective of improving traceability, the impact assessment does not adequately reflect the operational and financial burden on local authorities. 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

**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?**

No

Comments

**CALL FOR EVIDENCE ON MICROCHIPPING OF CATS**

**Q24. Do you keep, or own, one or more cats?**

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.**

Currently 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 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.

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.**

Currently 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, or the death of the animal.
- 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.
- Securing cooperation from other stakeholders to scan cats for microchips.
- Potential risks associated with implantation.

There are also several challenges specifically from 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 determining whether enforcement action for non-compliance is appropriate.
- 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 area the inconvenience in terms of proximity to a Veterinary practice or other microchip provider is likely to be a significant barrier.

In addition, 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. If contact details change, owners have additional administrative burden 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.**

Yes

Whilst Council agree 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, 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 requirement. 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 unchipped 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.

Councils believe the mandatory requirement would be unworkable, as there is no clear mechanism to distinguish between feral and unowned and pet cats. Attempting to enforce microchipping in such circumstances would be impractical.

Councils strongly believe 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 funded, rather it is supported through 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 Council that the microchipping of cats should be placed with an interested stakeholder.

If councils were expected to deliver this service, it would be difficult to manage public expectations and protect the reputation of the service, particularly where enforcement action is not considered to be in the public interest.

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 also notes that cat owners may face difficulty obtaining veterinary appointments for microchipping, which could create further enforcement challenges.

If mandatory cat microchipping is introduced, a robust public awareness campaign will be essential to ensure that owners understand their legal responsibilities and manage the expectations of the consequences of non-compliance.

Council remains of the view that cat microchipping would be better delivered through a centralised or charitable framework, rather than imposed on local authorities without the tools 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 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.

Councils also highlight that there should be exemptions included within the proposed legislation to cover a situation where an animal, for example, 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](mailto: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.

**Veterinary Service Animal Health Group**  
Animal Welfare and Dog Control Policy  
Branch



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

An Roinn

**Talmhaíochta, Comhshaoil  
agus Gnóthaí Tuaithe**

Department o'

**Fairmin, Environment  
an' Kintra Matthers**

[www.daera-ni.gov.uk](http://www.daera-ni.gov.uk)

Our Ref: Public Consultation on Proposed  
Animal Welfare Policy Reforms in Northern  
Ireland

Animal Welfare and Dog Control  
Policy Branch

Jubilee House

111 Ballykelly Road

Ballykelly

Limavady

BT49 9HP

Email: [animalwelfarepolicy@daera-ni.gov.uk](mailto:animalwelfarepolicy@daera-ni.gov.uk)

5 May 2026

Dear Sir/Madam,

### **Public Consultation on Proposed Animal Welfare Policy Reforms in Northern Ireland**

The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs has today launched its public consultation on proposed animal welfare policy reforms in Northern Ireland.

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.

Additionally, the consultation includes a call for evidence on the mandatory microchipping of pet cats.

Full details of the proposals are set out in the consultation document.

If you are deaf or have a hearing difficulty you can contact the Department via the Next Generation Text Relay Service by dialling 18001 + telephone number.

**INVESTORS IN PEOPLE**  
We invest in people Standard

The consultation will run from 5 May to 30 June 2026. The consultation document and related impact assessments can be viewed on the Department's website at:

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

The Department will then review responses and publish a summary of the feedback received. Subject to the nature of those responses and Ministers' consideration, the Department will set out a proposed way forward on the proposals. Evidence provided in relation to mandatory microchipping of pet cats will further be used to inform a way forward.

Yours sincerely,

**Animal Welfare and Dog Control Policy Branch**

If you are deaf or have a hearing difficulty you can contact the Department via the Next Generation Text Relay Service by dialling 18001 + telephone number.



# Consultation on proposed animal welfare policy reforms in Northern Ireland



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

An Roinn  
**Talmhaíochta, Comhshaoil  
agus Gnóthaí Tuaithe**

Department o'  
**Fairmin, Environment  
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[www.daera-ni.gov.uk](http://www.daera-ni.gov.uk)

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

On request, we can arrange to provide other formats of this document:

- Paper Copy
- Large Print
- Braille
- Other Languages

To request a copy of this document in another format, please contact:

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

Or alternatively, by:

Email: [animalwelfarepolicy@daera-ni.gov.uk](mailto:animalwelfarepolicy@daera-ni.gov.uk)

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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.

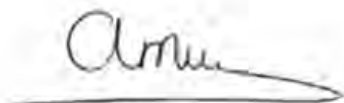
As these reforms continue, I want to now progress work on the remaining elements of the Pathway. I am conscious that the end of this Assembly term is fast approaching, so I am keen to seek views on the proposals contained within this consultation which will help to determine what the next steps are for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

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. Muir', with a long horizontal line extending to the right from the end of the signature.

**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;

## Consultation on proposed animal welfare policy reforms in Northern Ireland

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- 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 rehome 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](mailto: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](http://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](mailto:animalwelfarepolicy@daera-ni.gov.uk).

Written responses should be sent to:

E-mail: [animalwelfarepolicy@daera-ni.gov.uk](mailto: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](mailto: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](http://www.daera-ni.gov.uk)

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|  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| <b>Title:</b><br>Legislation to apply an inflationary increase to dog licence fees.                            | <b>Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA)</b>   |  |
|  | <b>Date:</b> March 2026   |  |
| <b>Lead department or agency:</b><br>Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (the Department) | <b>Type of measure:</b> Secondary Legislation   |  |
|  | <b>Stage:</b> Initial   |  |
|  | <b>Source of intervention:</b> Domestic NI  |  |
| <b>Other departments or agencies:</b><br>N/A   | <b>Contact details:</b> Animal Welfare and Dog Control Policy Branch  |  |
|  | Animal Welfare and Dog Control Policy Branch<br>DAERA<br>Jubilee House<br>111 Ballykelly Road<br>Limavady<br>BT49 9HP |  |
|  | <a href="mailto:animalwelfarepolicy@daera-ni.gov.uk">animalwelfarepolicy@daera-ni.gov.uk</a>                          |  |

**Summary Intervention and Options**

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>What is the problem under consideration? Why is government intervention necessary? (7 lines maximum)</b><br>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.   |   |
| <b>What are the policy objectives and the intended effects? (7 lines maximum)</b><br>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.   |   |
| <b>What policy options have been considered, including any alternatives to regulation? Please justify preferred option (further details in Evidence Base) (10 lines maximum)</b><br><b>Option 1:</b> Do nothing – the licence fee would remain as it is, the resource implications for councils would continue to widen.<br><b>Option 2:</b> <i>(the preferred option)</i> – 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.<br><b>Option 3:</b> The Department introduces new legislation to increase the licence fees at full cost recovery to the councils.<br><br><b>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.</b> |   |
| <b>Will the policy be reviewed?</b> It will be reviewed   | <b>If applicable, set review date:</b> 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  |

|  |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|
| <b>Does Implementation go beyond minimum EU requirements?</b>    |   | <b>YES</b> <input type="checkbox"/>                                 | <b>NO</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>                       |
| <b>Is this measure likely to impact on trade and investment?</b> |   | <b>YES</b> <input type="checkbox"/>                                 | <b>NO</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>                       |
| <b>Are any of these organisations in scope?</b>                  | <b>Micro</b>  | <b>Small</b>  | <b>Medium</b>   |
|  | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
|  |   |   | <b>Large</b>  |
|  |   |   | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |

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)<br>(constant price) | Years    | Average Annual (recurring)<br>(excl. transitional) (constant price) | Total Cost<br>(Present Value) |
|---------------|---|----------|---|-------------------------------|
| Low           | 0   | Optional | 0   | 0                             |
| High          | 0   | Optional | 0   | 0                             |
| 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)<br>(constant price) | Years | Average Annual (recurring)<br>(excl. transitional) (constant price) | Total Benefit<br>(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)**

|   |            |       |
|---|------------|-------|
| <b>Direct Impact on business (Equivalent Annual) £m</b> |            |       |
| 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.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> show 133,251 licences were issued for 138,083 dogs in Northern Ireland. Concessionary licence fees make up a majority

<sup>1</sup> [Inflation calculator | Bank of England](#)

<sup>2</sup> [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<sup>3</sup>, 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.

<sup>3</sup> [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 I - 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 <input type="checkbox"/>            | Strategy <input type="checkbox"/> | Plan <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Adopting a                  | Policy <input type="checkbox"/>            | Strategy <input type="checkbox"/> | Plan <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Implementing a              | Policy <input type="checkbox"/>            | Strategy <input type="checkbox"/> | Plan <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Revising a                  | Policy <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Strategy <input type="checkbox"/> | Plan <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Designing a Public Service  | <input type="checkbox"/>                   |                                   |                               |
| Delivering a Public Service | <input type="checkbox"/>                   |                                   |                               |

#### 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).

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  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                                    | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Rural Tourism                                       | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Rural Housing                                       | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Jobs or Employment in Rural Areas                   | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Education or Training in Rural Areas                | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Broadband or Mobile Communications in Rural Areas   | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Transport Services or Infrastructure in Rural Areas | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Health or Social Care Services in Rural Areas       | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Poverty in Rural Areas                              | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Deprivation in Rural Areas                          | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Rural Crime or Community Safety                     | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Rural Development                                   | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Agri-Environment                                    | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Other (Please state)                                | <input type="text"/>                |

**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   | <input type="checkbox"/> | Published Statistics | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Consultation with Other Organisations  | <input type="checkbox"/> | Research Papers      | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Surveys or Questionnaires  | <input type="checkbox"/> | Other Publications   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other Methods or Information Sources (include details in Question 3C below). |                          |                      | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**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.



|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>Rural Needs Impact Assessment undertaken by:</b> | Michelle Matthews                         |
| <b>Position/Grade:</b>                              | Deputy Principal                          |
| <b>Division/Branch</b>                              | Animal Health and Welfare Policy Division |
| <b>Signature:</b>                                   | <i>M. Matthews</i>                        |
| <b>Date:</b>  | 23 March 2026                             |
| <b>Rural Needs Impact Assessment approved by:</b>   | Christopher Andrews                       |
| <b>Position/Grade:</b>                              | G6  |
| <b>Division/Branch:</b>                             | Animal Health and Welfare Policy Division |
| <b>Signature:</b>                                   | C. Andrews                                |
| <b>Date:</b>  | 08 April 2026                             |

# Equality & Disability Duties Screening Template

December 2023 version



**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.

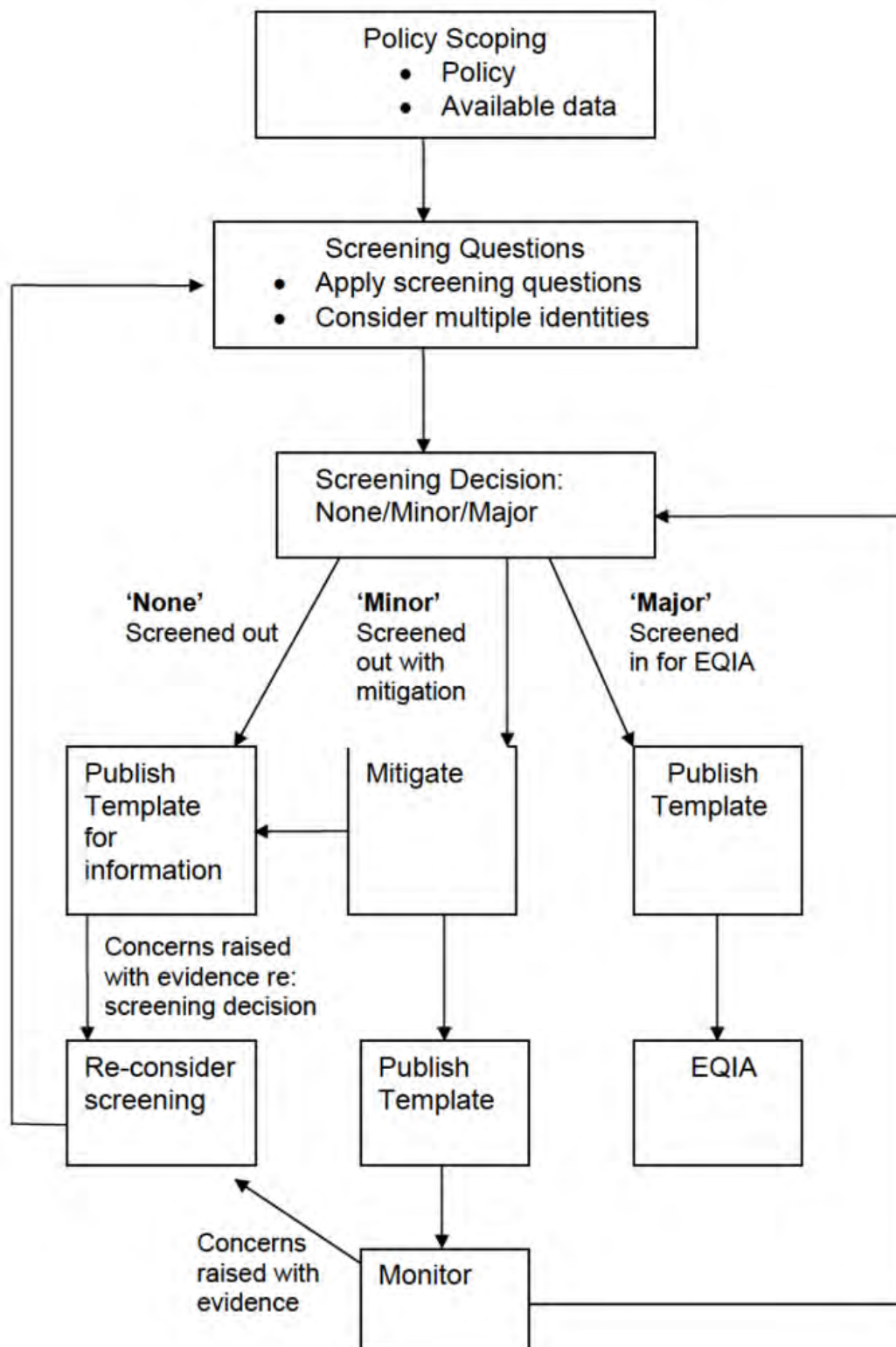
**Part 4. Monitoring** – provides guidance to public authorities on monitoring for adverse impact and broader monitoring.

**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.

Equality & Disability Duties – Screening Template

**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.

## Equality &amp; Disability Duties – Screening Template

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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 income 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

## Equality &amp; Disability Duties – Screening Template

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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'<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> [census-2021-ms-b19.xlsx](#)

Statistics provided by the UK Pet Food Association in 2024<sup>2</sup> 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<sup>3</sup> 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<sup>4</sup> survey showed the following political opinions of those interviewed:

- Unionist – 31%
- Nationalist – 26%
- Neither – 38%
- Other – 1%
- Don't know – 4%

<sup>2</sup> [UK Pet Food 2024 | Annual Report](#)

<sup>3</sup> [PFMA 2022 Annual Report | Pet Food Manufacturers Association](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey 2022: Online Questionnaire](#)

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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<sup>5</sup>. 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.

<sup>5</sup> [census-2021-ms-b01.xlsx](#)

Census 2021 figures show the following age breakdown for the NI population<sup>6</sup>:

- 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<sup>7</sup> 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<sup>8</sup> 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.

<sup>6</sup> [census-2021-ms-a02.xlsx](#)

<sup>7</sup> [pdsa-paw-report-2022.pdf](#)

<sup>8</sup> [census-2021-ms-a30.xlsx](#)

## Equality &amp; Disability Duties – Screening Template

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A PDSA animal wellbeing report in 2022<sup>9</sup> 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<sup>10</sup>. 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

<sup>9</sup> [pdsa-paw-report-2022.pdf](#)

<sup>10</sup> [census-2021-ms-c04.xlsx](#)

## Equality &amp; Disability Duties – Screening Template

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<sup>11</sup>. Data from a Pet Food Manufacturers Association (PFMA) survey from 2022<sup>12</sup> 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<sup>13</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> [census-2021-ms-a07.xlsx](#)

<sup>12</sup> [PFMA 2022 Annual Report | Pet Food Manufacturers Association](#)

<sup>13</sup> [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<sup>14</sup>.

Data from a Pet Food Manufacturers Association (PFMA) survey from 2022<sup>15</sup> 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

<sup>14</sup> [census-2021-ms-a24.xlsx](#)

<sup>15</sup> [PFMA 2022 Annual Report | Pet Food Manufacturers Association](#)

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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 & Disability Duties – Screening Template**

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

**Equality & Disability Duties – Screening Template**

- 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;

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- 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 |
|--|

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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.

## Equality &amp; Disability Duties – Screening Template

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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 marital 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

## Equality &amp; Disability Duties – Screening Template

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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:**

## Equality &amp; Disability Duties – Screening Template

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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:**

## Equality &amp; Disability Duties – Screening Template

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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:**

## Equality &amp; Disability Duties – Screening Template

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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)

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**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.

## Equality &amp; Disability Duties – Screening Template

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**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.

## Equality &amp; Disability Duties – Screening Template

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**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          |

## Equality &amp; Disability Duties – Screening Template

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| 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   | <b>Article 2</b> | No |
| Prohibition of torture, inhuman or degrading treatment                | <b>Article 3</b> | No |
| Prohibition of slavery and forced labour                              | <b>Article 4</b> | No |
| Right to liberty and security   | <b>Article 5</b> | No |
| Right to a fair and public trial                                      | <b>Article 6</b> | No |
| Right to no punishment without law                                    | <b>Article 7</b> | No |
| Right to respect for private and family life, home and correspondence | <b>Article 8</b> | No |

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|   |                                 |    |
|---|---------------------------------|----|
| Right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion  | <b>Article 9</b>                | No |
| Right to freedom of expression                        | <b>Article 10</b>               | No |
| Right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association | <b>Article 11</b>               | No |
| Right to marry and to found a family                  | <b>Article 12</b>               | No |
| The prohibition of discrimination                     | <b>Article 14</b>               | No |
| Protection of property and enjoyment of possessions   | <b>Protocol 1<br/>Article 1</b> | No |
| Right to education                                    | <b>Protocol 1<br/>Article 2</b> | No |
| Right to free and secret elections                    | <b>Protocol 1<br/>Article 3</b> | 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](mailto: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](mailto:equality@daera-ni.gov.uk)

Tel: 028 7744 2027



Department of  
**Agriculture, Environment  
and Rural Affairs**  
[www.daeira-ni.gov.uk](http://www.daeira-ni.gov.uk)

An Roinn  
**Talmhaíochta, Comhshaoil  
agus Gnóthaí Tuaithe**

Department of  
**Fairmin, Environment  
an' Kintra Matthers**

## 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

## Equality &amp; Disability Duties – Screening Template

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- 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](mailto:equality@daera-ni.gov.uk)



|  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>Title:</b><br>Regulations to strengthen dog microchipping requirements.   | <b>Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA)</b>   |
|  | <b>Date:</b> 26 March 2026  |
|  | <b>Type of measure:</b> Secondary Legislation   |
| <b>Lead department or agency:</b><br>Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA/the Department) | <b>Stage:</b> Initial   |
|  | <b>Source of intervention:</b> Domestic NI  |
| <b>Other departments or agencies:</b><br>N/A   | <b>Contact details:</b> Animal Welfare and Dog Control Policy Branch  |
|  | Animal Welfare and Dog Control Policy Branch<br>DAERA<br>Jubilee House<br>111 Ballykelly Road<br>Limavady<br>BT49 9HP |
|  | <a href="mailto:animalwelfarepolicy@daera-ni.gov.uk">animalwelfarepolicy@daera-ni.gov.uk</a>                          |

### Summary Intervention and Options

|   |
|---|
| <p><b>What is the problem under consideration? Why is government intervention necessary? (7 lines maximum)</b></p> <p>Dog control legislation, enforced by councils, requires owners to microchip (and licence) their dogs. When councils respond to calls about stray dogs, they attempt to reunite the animals with their owners. Where a dog is not microchipped, or details are out-of-date, and therefore cannot be reunited with its owners, councils put in place processes to impound the dog, and either locate the owner or make alternative provisions. Some dogs ultimately get rehomed, outside of Northern Ireland (NI), via shelters and other animal organisations. Intervention is necessary to afford these animals additional protections, in the form of enhanced traceability, leading to better outcomes for the animals, their owners, and for enforcement and rescue and rehoming organisations.</p> <p>As indicated in the Animal Welfare Pathway 2025-27 (<a href="#">DAERA Animal Welfare Pathway</a>), Animal Welfare is a top priority for the Minister, and the Pathway sets out the Minister's commitment to explore the merits of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• bolstering the current database requirements to ensure that NI dog owners' information is recorded, accessed and utilised in line with industry standards and facilitates pet traceability; and</li> <li>• making it an offence for dog owners to not update ownership details on microchip databases.</li> </ul> <p>The Pathway also indicates that proposed reforms will be explored in detail with all stakeholders and subject to full public consultation.</p> |
| <p><b>What are the policy objectives and the intended effects? (7 lines maximum)</b></p> <p>The objective of the policy is to improve the traceability of dogs by making new rules to bolster the current dog microchipping requirements, ultimately improving the dog's welfare. Current requirements are that dogs must be microchipped either before 8 weeks of age; upon sale/transfer, or by 6 months of age; and keepers must keep records (on a microchip database) updated as soon as reasonably practicable. Database providers must record specified details, and microchip implanters must be either a veterinary surgeon or a person who has received instruction on how to implant a microchip.</p>  |

**What policy options have been considered, including any alternatives to regulation? Please justify preferred option (further details in Evidence Base) (10 lines maximum)**

In terms of alternatives to revised regulations, it is considered that whilst publicity campaigns and guidance can support awareness, they are not a suitable alternative to legislation in this case. Changes to microchipping timeframes and requirements for updating keeper details require clear, legally enforceable provisions to ensure consistent compliance across all keepers and to support councils in delivering dog warden services.

**Selection of preferred options**

**Option 1 – Do Nothing**

**Option 2 – (the preferred option):** regulations to set out updated requirements regarding dog microchipping.

The new regulations will introduce a requirement for keepers to have their dog microchipped by eight weeks; keep microchip details up to date within a set timeframe, e.g. 14 days; and for breeder information to be included on the microchip database where the keeper was also the breeder.

New regulations would be made under the Dogs (Northern Ireland) Order 1983. The new regulations would be subject to negative resolution procedure in the Assembly, and they would amend Part 4 (Microchipping) of the Dogs (Licensing and Identification) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012.

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>Will the policy be reviewed?</b> It will be reviewed. | <b>If applicable, set review date:</b> This will be reviewed on an ongoing basis by the Department. |
|--|---|

| <b>Cost of Preferred (or more likely) Option</b> |  |  |
|--|--|--|
| <b>Total outlay cost for business</b><br>£m      | <b>Total net cost to business per year</b><br>£m | <b>Annual cost for implementation by Regulator</b><br>£m |
| 0  |  | 0  |

|  |   |   |  |   |
|--|---|---|--|---|
| <b>Does Implementation go beyond minimum EU requirements?</b>    | <b>YES</b> <input type="checkbox"/>   | <b>NO</b> <input type="checkbox"/>  |  |   |
| <b>Is this measure likely to impact on trade and investment?</b> | <b>YES</b> <input type="checkbox"/>   | <b>NO</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>                                       |  |   |
| <b>Are any of these organisations in scope?</b>                  | <b>Micro</b><br>Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> | <b>Small</b><br>Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> | <b>Medium</b><br>Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> | <b>Large</b><br>Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> |

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

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**ECONOMIC ASSESSMENT (Option 1: Do nothing)**

| Costs (£m)    | Total Transitional (Policy)<br>(constant price) | Years | Average Annual (recurring)<br>(excl. transitional) (constant price) | Total Cost<br>(Present Value) |
|---------------|---|-------|---|-------------------------------|
| Low           | 0Optional                                       |       | 0Optional   | 0Optional                     |
| High          | 0Optional                                       |       | 0Optional   | 0Optional                     |
| Best Estimate | No transitional costs                           |       | No average annual recurring costs                                   | No total costs                |

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

People who implant microchips into dogs, and dog keepers who change ownership/address, will see no additional requirements about keeping records up to date. However, councils and animal rescue organisations would continue to divert resource into dealing with unidentified, or incorrectly identified, animals.

| Benefits (£m) | Total Transitional (Policy)<br>(constant price) | Years | Average Annual (recurring)<br>(excl. transitional) (constant price) | Total Benefit<br>(Present Value) |
|---------------|---|-------|---|----------------------------------|
| Low           | 0Optional                                       |       | 0 Optional  | 0Optional                        |
| High          | 0Optional                                       |       | 0Optional   | 0Optional                        |
| Best Estimate | No benefits as no action taken                  |       |   | 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

Owners could continue to microchip their dogs at either before eight weeks of age; upon sale/transfer, or by six months of age; and they could decide that updating records (on a microchip database) when reasonably practicable for them could mean they will do it within months or years. Microchip databases would not be required to indicate those keepers who are also the breeders of their dogs.

Key Assumptions, Sensitivities, Risks Maximum 5 lines

Dogs not microchipped will not be licensed by local councils (due to the legislative licensing requirements) and so there exists a risk of lack of transparency for these animals. Databases not kept up-to-date with address changes mean that council reunification action for stray dogs is thwarted, and lack of breeder information may compliment poor practices in breeding dogs. There is therefore a risk of reputational damage to the Department, if it takes no action in this area.

**BUSINESS ASSESSMENT (Option 1: Do nothing)**

| Direct Impact on business (Equivalent Annual) £m |            |       |
|--|------------|-------|
| Costs:0  | Benefits:0 | Net:0 |

**Cross Border Issues (Option 1: Do nothing)**

How does this option compare to other UK regions and to other EU Member States (particularly Republic of Ireland) Maximum 3 lines

Great Britain (GB) and the Republic of Ireland (ROI) place further requirements on implanters, database providers, and dog keepers. Devolved Administrations in each jurisdiction publish databases holding themselves as compliant with legislation, and ROI publish databases which comply with conditions set out in regulations.

Summary: Analysis and Evidence

Policy Option 2

Description: Preferred Option: Strengthen current dog microchipping requirements.

**ECONOMIC ASSESSMENT (Option 2: Preferred Option - Strengthen current dog microchipping requirements.)**

| Costs (£m)    | Total Transitional (Policy)<br>(constant price) Years |  | Average Annual (recurring)<br>(excl. transitional) (constant price) | Total Cost<br>(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

Keepers would be required to microchip their dogs by eight weeks, meaning that they would be potentially incurring the cost quicker than they do at present. They would also have a time-bound administrative burden to keep the records held on a dog microchip database, up-to-date. Microchip databases would be obliged to hold breeder details, where the keepers also bred the dog.

| Benefits (£m) | Total Transitional (Policy)<br>(constant price) Years |  | Average Annual (recurring)<br>(excl. transitional) (constant price) | Total Benefit<br>(Present Value) |
|---------------|---|--|---|----------------------------------|
| Low           | £0 Optional   |  | £0 Optional   | £0Optional                       |
| High          | £0 Optional   |  | £0 Optional   | £0Optional                       |
| 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

Dog owners, whose pet becomes missing, will potentially be reunited with their pet in a shorter timeframe. Councils, who enforce animal welfare and dog control legislation, will potentially have more time to deal with other issues. Animal rescue and rehoming organisations will potentially have increased capacity for dealing with other more urgent cases and see less animals coming to them for rehoming.

Key Assumptions, Sensitivities, Risks Maximum 5 lines

Based on desktop research, the Department assumes a total NI dog population of approximately 270,000, of which an estimated 67% (about 180,000 dogs) may not be microchipped. This assumption is derived from council dog control statistics on stray dogs, which indicate that 67% of seized dogs were unmicrochipped. This represents the estimated number of keepers potentially impacted by the proposed policy reform. The Department recognises the risk that, given current non-compliance, similar issues could persist under new regulations. However, this risk is expected to be reduced through an accompanying awareness campaign and clearer, time-bound obligations. The consultation will also welcome further information on costs and benefits.

**BUSINESS ASSESSMENT (Option 2: Preferred Option - Strengthen current dog microchipping requirements)**

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

**Cross Border Issues (Option 2: Preferred Option - Strengthen current dog microchipping requirements)**

**How does this option compare to other UK regions and to other EU Member States (particularly Republic of Ireland) Maximum 3 lines**  
 GB & ROI place more requirements on implanters, database providers, and dog keepers. Devolved Administrations in GB each publish databases holding themselves as compliant with legislation, and ROI publish databases which comply with conditions set out in regulations.

## Evidence Base

### Problem under consideration, and rationale for intervention

Following engagement with animal welfare enforcement agencies, veterinary associations, agricultural bodies, and animal welfare organisations, on reforms which would have the most significant impact on enhancing animal welfare, the Animal Welfare Pathway 2025-27 ([DAERA Animal Welfare Pathway](#)), published the Minister's commitment to improving animal welfare, which included a commitment to 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; and
- making it an offence for dog owners to not update ownership details on microchip databases.

Link between dog licensing and microchipping: Microchipping of dogs is linked with licensing of dogs, and these matters are enforced by councils. The legislation in place in Northern Ireland (the Dogs (Northern Ireland) Order 1983 and the Dogs (Licensing and Identification) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012) specifies that a person needs a licence to keep a dog. Some exemptions are specified, for example, a licence is not required for a dog under six months who is kept by the person who also keeps/kept that dog's mother. A block licence is available to an owner of three or more dogs, as long as certain conditions are met.

The link between licensing and microchipping exists where the legislation provides that a licence must not be issued by a council unless the dog is microchipped (or exempted from microchipping by a veterinary surgeon).

Microchipping requirements: Dogs kept under a block licence must be microchipped before they reach eight weeks of age, or within seven days of arriving at the premises for which the block licence is in force. Where dogs are not kept by a person under a block licence or are not sold or otherwise transferred to another person, but kept with the mother, they must be microchipped by six months of age, as, until it reaches this age, it is not required to be kept under licence. This microchipping requirement does not apply where a certificate signed by a veterinary surgeon indicates that the effect that implantation in that dog would have an adverse effect on the health of the dog.

The microchip: Legislation sets out the technical standard for the type of microchip which must be used for the purposes of microchipping a dog. As an example, the microchip must comply with a specified ISO standard.

The implanter: The legislation specifies that the person who may implant a microchip must be either a veterinary surgeon or a person who has received instruction on how to implant a microchip. The legislation is silent as to 'instruction'.

The database of microchip records: The legislation specifies that for microchipping of a dog to be considered valid, the microchip must meet specific technical standards; and must be registered on a database, which is accessible to officers, and which holds the following information:

- the unique number generated by the microchip;
- the keeper's name and address; and at least one contact telephone number;
- in respect of the dog implanted:
  - its breed;
  - its sex;
  - colour and distinguishing marks; and
  - date of birth or estimated year of birth.

Keeping database records up to date: The competent person who carries out the microchipping must notify the database operator with details within seven days. The keeper must notify the database operator, of any changes to the keeper's name, address or telephone number, as soon as reasonably practicable.

Offences and penalties: Contravention of provisions regarding microchipping of dogs kept under a block licence, and contravention of conditions for valid microchipping, is each an offence under the 1983 Order, each subject to a penalty of up to level 3. Outside of this, these Microchipping Regulations are silent as to offences for failing to microchip a dog. It is an offence to take possession of a dog before a licence has been obtained for that dog, and it is also an offence to keep a dog without a licence. The penalty for each of these offences is a fine of up to £1,000. It is also an offence to give or sell a dog to another person, unless that other person has produced a licence for that dog. The penalty for this offence is a fine of up to £1,000.

### Other jurisdictions

The Department explored current legislation in the UK and noted that it made similar provisions to the legislation in place in NI, but in addition, included further requirements for implanters, dog keepers, and microchip database providers. For example, dogs must be microchipped by eight weeks, and local authorities have the power to require a

keeper to update details held on a database within 21 days. Databases must indicate those cases where the keeper of the dog is also the person who bred the dog.

The Department considers that intervention is required to improve the traceability of dogs.

- It is noted that whilst microchipping supports the dog licensing regime, this proposed intervention does not propose to amend licensing arrangements. Licensing policy is outside the scope of this proposed intervention. Also outside the scope of this intervention is validation of individual microchips, given that it would potentially require the creation of processes to confirm accuracy across multiple databases, which would be operationally complex and burdensome for the enforcers.
- In terms of alternatives to revised regulations, it is considered that whilst publicity campaigns and guidance can support awareness, they are not a suitable alternative to legislation in this case. Changes to microchipping timeframes and requirements for updating keeper details require clear, legally enforceable provisions to ensure consistent compliance across all keepers and enable effective enforcement for councils.

## **POLICY OBJECTIVES**

The objective of the policy is to improve the traceability, and ultimately the welfare, of dogs by making new rules to bolster the current microchipping requirements (which extend to dogs only).

## **Options considered, and their costs and benefits**

### **OPTION 1: Do nothing**

This option would see no intervention, meaning that things remain as they currently do.

### **OPTION 2: Strengthen current dog microchipping requirements**

The new regulations will introduce a requirement for keepers to microchip their dog before it is eight weeks of age (as opposed to the current requirement to microchip before eight weeks, upon sale/transfer, or by six months); to keep microchip details up to date within a set timeframe, e.g. 14 days (as opposed to the current requirement to update details when reasonably practicable), and to require database providers to record breeder information in those cases where the keeper is also the breeder (as opposed to the current requirements which are silent on this issue)

## **Costs and Benefits assessment**

### **Costs**

#### **Dog owners**

In terms of dog owners, council statistics indicate that, in the time period from April 2024 to March 2025, councils across NI impounded 2,330 stray dogs, and 1,572 (67%) of these were not microchipped. Using this figure of 67% as a baseline, and exploring the figures established through desktop research:

- according to a study from Dogs Trust, the University of Exeter and the University of Leeds, the UK dog population is close to 13 million and 2.1% of these dogs (approximately 273,000) reside in NI<sup>1</sup>. This document surmises that there could be potentially 182,910 unmicrochipped dogs in NI.
- according to Pets Magnet<sup>2</sup>, there are 270,000 dogs in NI, and so this document surmises that there might be potentially 180,000 unmicrochipped dogs in NI.

Therefore, from 1,572 to around 180,000 dog keepers, are currently at risk of a penalty for not having their dog microchipped as, barring any exemptions, they are currently required to microchip their dog at one of several points. This new requirement would mean that all keepers would be required to microchip their puppy by eight weeks of age.

The Department does not hold any information about how much microchipping of dog costs, but the People's Dispensary for Sick Animals (PDSA) website indicates that it usually costs between £10-£30<sup>3</sup>. This is a one-off fee which dog keepers will be required to pay at an earlier time-point, but it will not be an additional cost.

<sup>1</sup> [UK dog population may be millions more than estimated | Dogs Trust](#)

<sup>2</sup> <https://petsmagnet.co.uk/blogs/news/pet-dog-population-in-the-united-kingdom-of-great-britain-and-northern-ireland>

<sup>3</sup> [Microchipping Your Dog - PDSA](#)

Microchip database providers

The Department understands that there are 22 database providers providing a service in NI. The Department does not hold any information on their costs to ensure the service is reflective of the new rules. In addition, the Department does not hold any information on fees which these database providers might charge a customer, for example for updating the records due to things like a change of address. Given that they currently record dog keeper, and dog, information, on databases and make that information available to councils, it is considered that the cost will potentially include an add-on to their current database system that enables retention of keeper information, and training of operators.

Councils

Under dog control legislation, and animal welfare legislation, councils are responsible for enforcement relating to companion/pet animals. Councils will therefore be the regulatory authority under the proposal. The Department does not hold any information on the council resources which will be used to exercise its role to administer and enforce the new rules. It is considered that the cost will potentially include training of officers to provide information on new requirements for keepers, and on the additional information available to them from the database providers as they continue to enforce legislation.

The consultation will welcome evidence on costs.

The Department

The Department intends for the new regulations to be accompanied by an awareness campaign. It is expected that the associated costs will be incorporated within the existing animal welfare and responsible dog ownership campaign, with messaging covering issues such as proper identification and microchipping.

Benefits from preferred option

The preferred option will improve the traceability, and welfare, of dogs by strengthening the current microchipping requirements. Missing pets will be reunited with their owners at a quicker pace.

Dog owners

From 1,572 to around 180,000 dog keepers, are currently at risk of a penalty for not having their dog microchipped. An unknown quantity of dog keepers who have microchipped their dog, may have not yet updated those details with, for example, any change of address information. This new requirement will compel action at particular time points (rather than, for example, at a point when it is reasonably practicable for the dog keeper). This, when coupled with awareness information, would encourage owners to microchip their dogs by eight weeks of age, potentially saving them travel and other expenses incurred in trying to find their dog, where it strays/goes missing.

Microchip database providers

Database providers will be able to satisfy their customer's needs by recording dog keeper, and dog breeder (where the keeper is also the breeder), information, on databases. This has the potential to raise their profile in a positive way.

Councils

Council officers will potentially be able to retrieve accurate and up to date information pertaining to dogs that they are trying to reunite with their owners, meaning that their reunification rates/limes might increase. This new requirement will compel action at particular time points (rather than, for example, at a point when it is reasonably practicable for the dog keeper) and therefore is a stronger enforcement tool for councils. This, when coupled with awareness information, would encourage owners to microchip their dogs by eight weeks of age, potentially saving them travel and other expenses incurred in trying to find their dog, where it strays/goes missing. This has the potential to raise their profile in a positive way.

Wider impacts, from preferred option:

Animal rescue and rehoming organisations will potentially see less lost/stray animals coming to them for rehoming.

Increased transparency will be afforded to NI's dog population, and this will have the potential to strengthen other areas, including breeding and selling.

### **Risks and assumptions**

Currently there are a lot of dogs already in breach of regulations related to microchipping, so a new regulation may have the same issues. However, this risk will be reduced when the regulations are accompanied by an awareness campaign. It is noted that an assumption has been made around the size of the dog population in NI, and how many dogs are not microchipped. This is due to the fact that the evidence used was the council statistics on dog control, which included numbers of dogs seized and whether they were microchipped. The consultation will welcome information on costs and benefits.

### **Overall impact**

The proposed policy brings with it benefits that outweigh the costs, although the Department encourages respondents to provide evidence on any unforeseen costs. The overall impact is considered to be positive, fostering better welfare standards for Northern Ireland's dogs, and increased transparency, and owner accountability.

### **Preferred Option**

OPTION 2: Strengthen current dog microchipping requirements.

This option would mean that new regulations would be made which would set out updated requirements regarding microchipping of dogs and also strengthen requirements regarding databases of microchip information.

## Appendix I - 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 make regulations to strengthen current dog microchipping requirements. (Current requirements regarding dog microchipping are set out in the Dogs (Northern Ireland) Order 1983 and the Dogs (Licensing and Identification) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012)).

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

|                             |  |                                   |                               |
|-----------------------------|--|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Developing a                | Policy <input type="checkbox"/>            | Strategy <input type="checkbox"/> | Plan <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Adopting a                  | Policy <input type="checkbox"/>            | Strategy <input type="checkbox"/> | Plan <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Implementing a              | Policy <input type="checkbox"/>            | Strategy <input type="checkbox"/> | Plan <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Revising a                  | Policy <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Strategy <input type="checkbox"/> | Plan <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Designing a Public Service  | <input type="checkbox"/>                   |                                   |                               |
| Delivering a Public Service | <input type="checkbox"/>                   |                                   |                               |

#### 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 regulations made under the Dogs (Northern Ireland) Order 1983 to bolster current dog microchipping requirements.

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

In the Animal Welfare Pathway 2025-27 ([DAERA Animal Welfare Pathway](#)), the Minister committed to exploring bolstering current database requirements and making it an offence for dog owners to not update details on databases. The objective of the policy, which derives from this commitment, is to improve the traceability, and welfare, of dogs by bolstering the current dog microchipping legislative requirements.

**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).

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  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.**

Currently there are various timeframes for microchipping dogs: before they reach eight weeks of age; before being sold or given away, and for puppies kept with their mother, by six months of age. The microchip implanter must be a vet or someone who has received instruction, and he/she must then record the details on a microchip database within seven days. Keepers must then advise the database provider of any change (e.g. address) as soon as reasonably practicable.

The new policy will specify that all dogs must be microchipped before they reach eight weeks of age, and will place specific, time-bound, requirements on owners to keep their records up to date, e.g. within 14 days. Keepers will also be obliged to declare where they are also the breeder of the dog so that this information can be recorded on the database.

The impact of the new policy will be the same for people in rural areas as it is for people in urban areas. Veterinary surgeons, who are also implanters, and councils, who enforce the legislation, will be able to identify dogs presented to them, as well as obtain up-to-date owner details. The effect of this will be to facilitate greater pet dog traceability and reunification.

**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.**

N/A. The policy will impact on people in rural areas in the same way as it will impact on people 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                                    | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Rural Tourism                                       | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Rural Housing                                       | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Jobs or Employment in Rural Areas                   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Education or Training in Rural Areas                | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Broadband or Mobile Communications in Rural Areas   | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Transport Services or Infrastructure in Rural Areas | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Health or Social Care Services in Rural Areas       | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Poverty in Rural Areas                              | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Deprivation in Rural Areas                          | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Rural Crime or Community Safety                     | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Rural Development                                   | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Agri-Environment                                    | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Other (Please state)                                | <input type="text"/>                |

**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   | <input type="checkbox"/> | Published Statistics | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Consultation with Other Organisations  | <input type="checkbox"/> | Research Papers      | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Surveys or Questionnaires  | <input type="checkbox"/> | Other Publications   | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Other Methods or Information Sources (include details in Question 3C below). |                          |                      | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |

**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.**

Officials explored the Northern Ireland's Census 2021 ([Northern Ireland Census Data](#)) and its associated search portal ([Northern Ireland Census Data](#)) which displays the population and households information about each of Northern Ireland's towns and areas. There is no data on dog ownership in these areas. Councils provide information to DAERA on a quarterly basis ([Council Dog Summary Statistics](#)) and this is then published on the DAERA website. The statistics provide information on dog licensing, including strays that were microchipped. The statistics do not provide any break-down information on the towns/areas/rural areas within districts. Officials explored council statistics, which are published on the DAERA website. These indicate that in April 2024 to March 2025, councils impounded 2,330 stray dogs, 1,572 (67%) of which were not microchipped. According to the council statistics, the 11 councils seized stray dogs in this period, as follows:

Antrim and Newtownabbey BC: 103 dogs out of 164 seized were microchipped. Ards and North Down BC: 58 dogs out of 103 seized were microchipped. Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon BC: 142 dogs out of 476 seized were microchipped. Belfast CC: 276 dogs out of 422 seized were microchipped. Causeway Coast and Glens BC: 88 dogs out of 186 seized were microchipped. Derry and Strabane DC: 26 dogs out of 277 seized were microchipped. Fermanagh and Omagh DC: 177 dogs out of 251 seized were microchipped. Lisburn and Castlereagh CC: 51 dogs out of 123 seized were microchipped. Mid and East Antrim BC: 102 dogs out of 188 seized were microchipped. Mid Ulster DC: 9 dogs out of 280 seized were microchipped. Newry, Mourne and Down DC: 79 dogs out of 285 seized were microchipped.

**3D. Please provide details of the social and economic needs of people in rural areas which have been identified by the Public Authority?**

The social and economic needs of people in rural areas in relation to this policy do not differ from the social and economic needs of people from urban areas.

All dog owners will be required to ensure their pet is microchipped by the specified age and will be required to declare where they are also the breeder of the dog. The implanter will continue to be required to ensure the details pertaining to the microchip are recorded on a microchip database, and all owners will be required to keep their details up to date on that database within a specified timeframe, e.g. 14 days, rather than when 'reasonably practicable'.

The Department will consider any evidence of a particular need of people in rural areas that may be brought to its attention during the public consultation process.

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.**

The social and economic needs of people in rural areas in relation to this policy do not differ from the social and economic needs of the people from urban 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.**

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.

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Rural Needs Impact Assessment undertaken by:</b> | Brenda Kelly                                 |
| <b>Position/Grade:</b>                              | DP   |
| <b>Division/Branch</b>                              | Animal Welfare and Dog Control Policy Branch |
| <b>Signature:</b>                                   | B KELLY                                      |
| <b>Date:</b>  | 26 March 2026                                |
| <b>Rural Needs Impact Assessment approved by:</b>   | Christopher Andrews                          |
| <b>Position/Grade:</b>                              | Grade 6                                      |
| <b>Division/Branch:</b>                             | Animal Health and Welfare Policy Division    |
| <b>Signature:</b>                                   | Signed: C. Andrews                           |
| <b>Date:</b>  | 8 April 2026                                 |

# Equality & Disability Duties Screening Template

December 2023 version



**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.

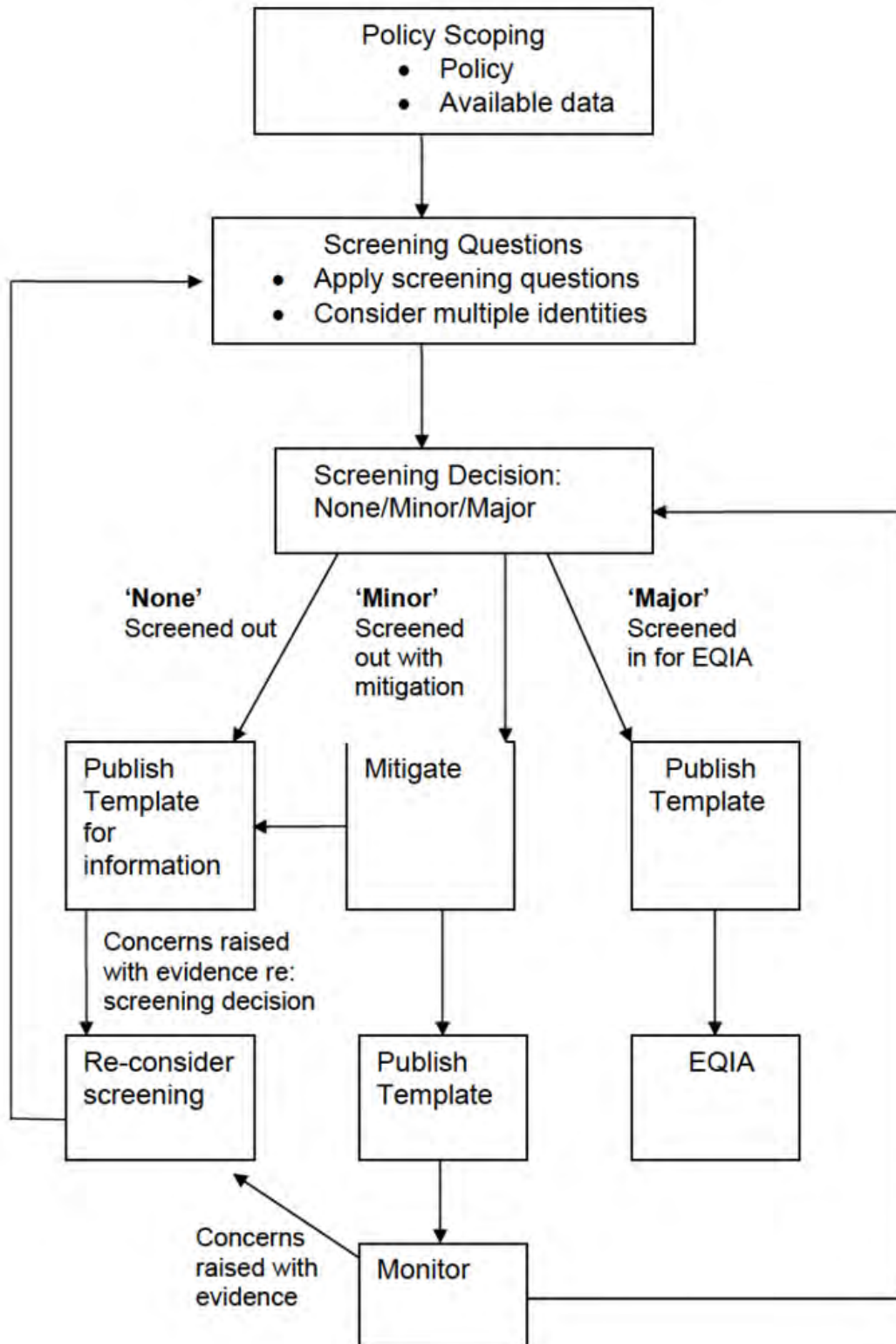
**Part 4. Monitoring** – provides guidance to public authorities on monitoring for adverse impact and broader monitoring.

**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.

**Equality & Disability Duties – Screening Template**

**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

Regulations to strengthen dog microchipping requirements.

#### Is this an existing, revised or new policy?

Revised policy.

Current requirements regarding dog microchipping are set out in the Dogs (Northern Ireland) Order 1983 and the Dogs (Licensing and Identification) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012).

#### What is it trying to achieve? (intended aims/outcomes)

As indicated in the Animal Welfare Pathway 2025-27<sup>1</sup>, Animal Welfare is a top priority for the Minister, and the Pathway sets out the Minister's commitment to 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; and
- making it an offence for dog owners to not update ownership details on microchip databases.

The Pathway also indicates that proposed reforms will be explored in detail with all stakeholders and subject to full public consultation.

The overarching objective of the proposed policy is to improve the traceability and welfare of dogs by making new rules to bolster the current microchipping requirements.

Microchipping of dogs is linked with licensing of dogs. Persons who wish to keep a dog in Northern Ireland must first obtain a dog licence from their local council to do so. A council cannot issue a dog licence unless the dog is microchipped.

There are various legislative provisions which specify when a dog must be microchipped. Currently, dogs kept under a block licence, and puppies kept in a commercial dog breeding establishment, must be microchipped before they reach 8 weeks of age (a block licence is a single licence that lets someone keep several dogs, instead of needing a separate dog licence for each

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<sup>1</sup> [DAERA Animal Welfare Pathway](#)

## Equality &amp; Disability Duties – Screening Template

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individual dog). Dogs not kept under a block licence, and which are kept with the mother, must be microchipped by the time they reach six months old. Dogs being sold or given away must be licensed and therefore must be microchipped.

Current regulations set out the technical standard for the type of microchip which must be used for microchipping and also specify the details to be recorded on a database which is accessible to officers. In addition, they place some requirements on implanters and keepers regarding keeping records up to date. E.g. the implantation must be carried out by a veterinary surgeon or a person who received instruction on how to implant a microchip (and the microchip details would then be recorded on a microchip database); and if specified details change (e.g. address) then the keeper would continue to be obliged to notify the database provider as soon as reasonably practicable.

The proposed policy will specify that all dogs be microchipped before they reach eight weeks of age. The proposed policy will also require keepers to confirm whether they bred the dog themselves, so that this breeder status can be included as part of the dog's microchip record. It will also place specific requirements on owners to keep their records up to date in a specified timeframe (e.g. 14 days rather than as soon as reasonably practicable). The effect of this will be to enable the system of microchipping to better facilitate pet traceability.

This proposed policy will help protect and improve the welfare of dogs. The requirement for up-to-date records will also have a positive effect of stray dogs being reunited with their owners more efficiently and may also have positive impacts on animal rescue charities/establishments.

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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. (The Department)

Who owns and who implements the policy?

The Department owns the policy and legislation, and 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:

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The enabling powers regarding dog microchipping are set out in the Dogs (Northern Ireland) Order 1983, and current provisions are prescribed in the Dogs (Licensing and Identification) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012).

### 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**

In terms of service users, dog keepers who are required to meet current requirements, will be required to meet revised requirements, regarding microchipping their dog, and keeping details up to date on the database that holds their details. These dog keepers will be required to declare that they bred the dog themselves (if that is the case). Database providers who are required to meet current requirements, will be required to meet revised requirements in terms of recording breeder details (where the breeder is also the keeper).

In terms of other public sector organisations, local councils are responsible for enforcing the Dogs (Northern Ireland) Order 1983. Enforcement would therefore fall to councils.

**Voluntary/community/trade unions**

**Other, please specify**

### Other policies with a bearing on this policy

**What are they?**

Current requirements regarding dog microchipping are set out in the Dogs (Northern Ireland) Order 1983 and the Dogs (Licensing and Identification) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012). The enabling powers for the legislation

## Equality &amp; Disability Duties – Screening Template

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relating to the proposed policy are set out in the Dogs (Northern Ireland) Order 1983.

**Who owns them?**

The Department

**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:**

Northern Ireland's Census 2021<sup>2</sup> illustrates the religious composition of Northern Ireland as:

- Catholic: 42.31%
- Presbyterian Church in Ireland: 16.61%
- Church of Ireland: 11.55%
- Methodist Church in Ireland: 2.35%
- Other Christian (including Christian related): 6.85%
- Other religions: 1.34%

<sup>2</sup> [Census 2021 main statistics identity tables | Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency](#)

- No religion: 17.39%
- Religion not stated: 1.60%

The Dogs (Northern Ireland) Order 1983 makes provision for the licensing of dogs. Article 52 of the Order requires Councils to provide information relating to the operating of the Order as required by the Department. Councils provide information on a quarterly basis<sup>3</sup>, and this information is then published on the DAERA website. The statistics provide information on a wide range of topics, including dog licences, and strays that were microchipped before they were seized by the council. Council statistics indicate that in April 2024 to March 2025, councils across NI impounded 2,330 stray dogs, and 1,572 (67%) of these were not microchipped. The statistics do not provide information on the religious composition of dog keepers.

The Dogs Trust's National Dog Survey 2025<sup>4</sup> indicates that 6,512 people from Northern Ireland (NI) responded to its survey about dogs. Responses were received from participants across all four nations of the UK, 2% of whom were from NI, broadly reflecting the UK population distribution. The survey indicates: most were aged between 45 and 74 years (64%); the majority identified as female (80%); the vast majority identified as White British (94%); most households consisted of two adults, and 19% included children; most respondents were homeowners (76%), while 20% reported renting their home. The survey did not include information about religious belief. The survey indicated that in terms of interpreting the data, the National Dog Survey uses a voluntary, convenience sample which is not necessarily nationally representative. Some groups are over-represented, and comprehensive data on dog ownership rates are lacking.

<sup>3</sup> [Council dog summary statistics | Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs](#)

<sup>4</sup> [NDS 2025 State of the nation report desktop version.pdf](#)

The forthcoming public consultation will provide an opportunity for individuals and groups to express their views. Any issues relating to religious beliefs raised during the consultation period will be carefully considered when determining the final policy proposal.

### Political Opinion evidence/information:

The NI Life & Times survey 2024<sup>5</sup> illustrates the political opinion composition of Northern Ireland as:

- Unionist: 30%
- Nationalist: 30%
- Neither: 35%
- Other answer: 2%
- Don't know: 3%

The Dogs (Northern Ireland) Order 1983 makes provision for the licensing of dogs. Article 52 of the Order requires Councils to provide information relating to the operating of the Order as required by DAERA. Councils provide information on a quarterly basis<sup>6</sup>, and this information is then published on the DAERA website. The statistics provide information on a wide range of topics, including dog licences, and strays that were microchipped before they were seized by the council. The statistics do not provide information on the political opinion of dog keepers.

<sup>5</sup> [Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey: 2024](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Council dog summary statistics | Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs](#)

The Dogs Trust's National Dog Survey 2025<sup>7</sup> indicates that 6,512 people from NI 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 NI, broadly reflecting the UK population distribution; most were aged between 45 and 74 years (64%); the majority identified as female (80%); the vast majority identified as White British (94%); most households consisted of two adults, and 19% included children; most respondents were homeowners (76%), while 20% reported renting their home. The survey did not include information about political opinion. The survey indicated that in terms of interpreting the data, the National Dog Survey uses a voluntary, convenience sample which is not necessarily nationally representative. Some groups are over-represented, and comprehensive data on dog ownership rates are lacking.

The forthcoming public consultation will provide an opportunity for individuals and groups to express their views. Any issues relating to political opinions raised during the consultation period will be carefully considered when determining the final policy proposal.

### **Racial Group evidence/information:**

Northern Ireland's Census 2021<sup>8</sup> illustrates the racial group composition of Northern Ireland as:

- White: 96.55%
- Irish Traveller: 0.14%
- Roma: 0.08%
- Indian: 0.52%

<sup>7</sup> [NDS 2025 State of the nation report desktop version.pdf](#)

<sup>8</sup> [Census 2021 main statistics identity tables | Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency](#)

- Chinese: 0.50%
- Filipino: 0.23%
- Pakistani: 0.08%
- Arab: 0.10%
- Other Asian: 0.28%
- Black African: 0.42%
- Black Other: 0.16%
- Mixed: 0.76%
- Other ethnicities: 0.19%

The Dogs (Northern Ireland) Order 1983 makes provision for the licensing of dogs. Article 52 of the Order requires Councils to provide information relating to the operating of the Order as required by DAERA. Councils provide information on a quarterly basis<sup>9</sup>, and this information is then published on the DAERA website. The statistics provide information on a wide range of topics, including dog licences, and strays that were microchipped before they were seized by the council. The statistics do not provide information on racial groups.

The Dogs Trust's National Dog Survey 2025<sup>10</sup> 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 vast majority identified as White British (94%). The survey indicated that in terms of interpreting the data, the National Dog Survey uses a voluntary, convenience sample which is not necessarily

<sup>9</sup> [Council dog summary statistics | Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs](#)

<sup>10</sup> [NDS 2025 State of the nation report desktop version.pdf](#)

nationally representative. Some groups are over-represented, and other groups, such as people from minority ethnic backgrounds, may be under-represented. It added that comprehensive data on dog ownership rates are lacking.

The forthcoming public consultation will provide an opportunity for individuals and groups to express their views. Any issues relating to racial group raised during the consultation period will be carefully considered when determining the final policy proposal.

### Age evidence/information:

Northern Ireland's Census 2021<sup>11</sup> illustrates the age composition of Northern Ireland as:

- 0-4 years: 5.98%
- 5-9 years: 6.54%
- 10-14 years: 6.67%
- 15-19 years: 5.95%
- 20-24 years: 5.85%
- 25-29 years: 6.12%
- 30-34 years: 6.62%
- 35-39 years: 6.69%
- 40-44 years: 6.42%
- 45-49 years: 6.39%
- 50-54 years: 6.88%
- 55-59 years: 6.79%
- 60-64 years: 5.94%

<sup>11</sup> [Main statistics | Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency](#)

- 65-69 years: 4.91%
- 70-74 years: 4.39%
- 75-79 years: 3.49%
- 80-84 years: 2.30%
- 85-89 years: 1.36%
- 90+ years: 0.71%

The Dogs (Northern Ireland) Order 1983 makes provision for the licensing of dogs. Article 52 of the Order requires Councils to provide information relating to the operating of the Order as required by DAERA. Councils provide information on a quarterly basis<sup>12</sup>, and this information is published on the DAERA website. The statistics provide information on a wide range of topics, including dog licences, and strays that were microchipped before they were seized by the council. The statistics do not provide information on the age of dog owners. Legislation however provides that a person must be 16 or over to get a dog licence, so the council dog licensing information pertains to those aged 16 and over.

The Dogs Trust's National Dog Survey 2025<sup>13</sup> 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 most were aged between 45 and 74 years (64%). The survey indicated that in terms of interpreting the data, the National Dog Survey uses a voluntary, convenience sample which is not necessarily nationally representative. Some groups are over-represented, and comprehensive data on dog ownership rates are lacking.

<sup>12</sup> [Council dog summary statistics | Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs](#)

<sup>13</sup> [NDS 2025 State of the nation report desktop version.pdf](#)

The forthcoming public consultation will provide an opportunity for individuals and groups to express their views. Any issues relating to age raised during the consultation period will be carefully considered when determining the final policy proposal.

### Marital Status evidence/information:

Northern Ireland's Census 2021<sup>14</sup> illustrates the marital status composition of Northern Ireland as:

- Single (never married or never registered civil partnership): 38.07%
- Married: 45.59%
- In a civil partnership: 0.18%
- Separated (but still legally married or still legally in a civil partnership): 3.78%
- Divorced or formerly in a civil partnership which is now legally dissolved: 6.02%
- Widowed or surviving partner from a civil partnership: 6.36%

The Dogs (Northern Ireland) Order 1983 makes provision for the licensing of dogs. Article 52 of the Order requires Councils to provide information relating to the operating of the Order as required by DAERA. Councils provide information on a quarterly basis<sup>15</sup>, and this information is then published on the DAERA website. The statistics provide information on a wide range of topics, including dog licences, and strays that were microchipped before they were seized by the council. The statistics do not provide information on the marital status of dog keepers.

<sup>14</sup> [Main statistics | Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency](#)

<sup>15</sup> [Council dog summary statistics | Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs](#)

The Dogs Trust's National Dog Survey 2025<sup>16</sup> 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 were aged between 45 and 74 years (64%); the majority identified as female (80%); the vast majority identified as White British (94%); most households consisted of two adults, and 19% included children; most respondents were homeowners (76%), while 20% reported renting their home. The survey did not include information about marital status. The survey indicated that in terms of interpreting the data, the National Dog Survey uses a voluntary, convenience sample which is not necessarily nationally representative. Some groups are over-represented, and comprehensive data on dog ownership rates are lacking.

The forthcoming public consultation will provide an opportunity for individuals and groups to express their views. Any issues relating to marital status raised during the consultation period will be carefully considered when determining the final policy proposal.

### **Sexual Orientation evidence/information:**

Northern Ireland's Census 2021<sup>17</sup> illustrates the sexual orientation of Northern Ireland as:

- Straight or heterosexual: 90.04%
- Gay, lesbian, bisexual, other sexual orientation: 2.09%
- Prefer not to say or not stated: 7.87%

<sup>16</sup> [NDS 2025 State of the nation report desktop version.pdf](#)

<sup>17</sup> [Main statistics | Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency](#)

The Dogs (Northern Ireland) Order 1983 makes provision for the licensing of dogs. Article 52 of the Order requires Councils to provide information relating to the operating of the Order as required by DAERA. Councils provide information on a quarterly basis<sup>18</sup>, and this information is then published on the DAERA website. The statistics provide information on a wide range of topics, including dog licences, and strays that were microchipped before they were seized by the council. The statistics do not provide information on the sexual orientation of dog keepers.

The Dogs Trust's National Dog Survey 2025<sup>19</sup> 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 were aged between 45 and 74 years (64%); the majority identified as female (80%); the vast majority identified as White British (94%); most households consisted of two adults, and 19% included children; most respondents were homeowners (76%), while 20% reported renting their home. The survey did not include information about sexual orientation. The survey indicated that in terms of interpreting the data, the National Dog Survey uses a voluntary, convenience sample which is not necessarily nationally representative. Some groups are over-represented, and comprehensive data on dog ownership rates are lacking.

The forthcoming public consultation will provide an opportunity for individuals and groups to express their views. Any issues relating to sexual orientation

<sup>18</sup> [Council dog summary statistics | Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs](#)

<sup>19</sup> [NDS 2025 State of the nation report desktop version.pdf](#)

raised during the consultation period will be carefully considered when determining the final policy proposal.

### **Men & Women generally evidence/information:**

Northern Ireland's Census 2021<sup>20</sup> illustrates the sex composition of Northern Ireland as:

Female: 50.81%

Male: 49.19%

The Dogs (Northern Ireland) Order 1983 makes provision for the licensing of dogs. Article 52 of the Order requires Councils to provide information relating to the operating of the Order as required by DAERA. Councils provide information on a quarterly basis<sup>21</sup>, and this information is then published on the DAERA website. The statistics provide information on a wide range of topics, including dog licences, and strays that were microchipped before they were seized by the council. The statistics do not provide information on the sex of dog keepers.

The Dogs Trust's National Dog Survey 2025<sup>22</sup> 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 survey indicated that in terms of interpreting the data, the National Dog Survey uses a voluntary, convenience sample which is not necessarily

<sup>20</sup> [Main statistics | Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency](#)

<sup>21</sup> [Council dog summary statistics | Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs](#)

<sup>22</sup> [NDS 2025 State of the nation report desktop version.pdf](#)

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nationally representative. Some groups are over-represented, and comprehensive data on dog ownership rates are lacking.

The forthcoming public consultation will provide an opportunity for individuals and groups to express their views. Any issues relating to gender raised during the consultation period will be carefully considered when determining the final policy proposal.

**Disability evidence/information:**

Northern Ireland's Census 2021<sup>23</sup> illustrates the number of residents in households with a limiting or long-term problem or disability, in Northern Ireland, as:

- No residents have a limiting long-term health problem or disability: 55.14%
- One resident has a limiting long-term health problem or disability: 33.63%
- Two or more residents have a limiting long-term health problem or disability: 11.23%

The Dogs (Northern Ireland) Order 1983 makes provision for the licensing of dogs. Article 52 of the Order requires Councils to provide information relating to the operating of the Order as required by DAERA. Councils provide information on a quarterly basis<sup>24</sup>, and this information is then published on the DAERA website. The statistics provide information on a wide range of topics, including dog licences, and strays that were microchipped before they

<sup>23</sup> [Main statistics | Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency](#)

<sup>24</sup> [Council dog summary statistics | Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs](#)

were seized by the council. The statistics do not provide information on whether dog keepers have a limiting long-term problem or disability.

The Dogs Trust's National Dog Survey 2025<sup>25</sup> 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 were aged between 45 and 74 years (64%); the majority identified as female (80%); the vast majority identified as White British (94%); most households consisted of two adults, and 19% included children; most respondents were homeowners (76%), while 20% reported renting their home. The survey did not include information about disability. The survey indicated that in terms of interpreting the data, the National Dog Survey uses a voluntary, convenience sample which is not necessarily nationally representative. Some groups are over-represented, and comprehensive data on dog ownership rates are lacking.

The forthcoming public consultation will provide an opportunity for individuals and groups to express their views. Any issues relating to disability raised during the consultation period will be carefully considered when determining the final policy proposal.

### Dependants evidence/information:

Northern Ireland's Census 2021<sup>26</sup> illustrates the number of dependent children in households in Northern Ireland, as:

- No children in household: 53.15%

<sup>25</sup> [NDS 2025 State of the nation report desktop version.pdf](#)

<sup>26</sup> [Main statistics | Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency](#)

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- No dependent children in household/All children in household non-dependent: 16.17%
- One dependent child aged 0-4: 3.86%
- One dependent child aged 5-11: 2.96%
- One dependent child aged 12-18: 5.32%
- Two dependent children, youngest aged 0-4: 4.48%
- Two dependent children, youngest aged 5-11: 4.94%
- Two dependent children, youngest aged 12-18: 2.48%
- Three or more dependent children, youngest aged 0-4: 3.27%
- Three or more dependent children, youngest aged 5-11: 2.91%
- Three or more dependent children, youngest aged 12-18: 0.47%

The Dogs (Northern Ireland) Order 1983 makes provision for the licensing of dogs. Article 52 of the Order requires Councils to provide information relating to the operating of the Order as required by DAERA. Councils provide information on a quarterly basis<sup>27</sup>, and this information is then published on the DAERA website. The statistics provide information on a wide range of topics, including dog licences, and strays that were microchipped before they were seized by the council. The statistics do not provide information on the dependents of dog keepers.

The Dogs Trust's National Dog Survey 2025<sup>28</sup> 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%

<sup>27</sup> [Council dog summary statistics | Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs](#)

<sup>28</sup> [NDS 2025 State of the nation report desktop version.pdf](#)

included children. The survey indicated that in terms of interpreting the data, the National Dog Survey uses a voluntary, convenience sample which is not necessarily nationally representative. Some groups are over-represented, and comprehensive data on dog ownership rates are lacking.

The forthcoming public consultation will provide an opportunity for individuals and groups to express their views. Any issues relating to dependents raised during the consultation period will be carefully considered 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

The legislation will require all dogs to be microchipped by eight weeks of age. Keepers will be required to confirm whether they bred the dog so this can be added to the dog's microchip record, and they must update their details within a specified timeframe (e.g. 14 days). The policy will be applied to all dog owners in Northern Ireland. People in this category will have no particular needs, experiences or priorities. The public consultation will however provide an opportunity for the people in this category to raise any issues, and the Department will consider accordingly.

**Political Opinion****Racial Group****Age****Marital status****Sexual orientation****Men and Women Generally****Disability****Dependants****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

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- 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.

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- 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 keepers in NI, and database providers, regardless of religious belief, will be required to meet requirements regarding dog microchipping. Local councils will remain responsible for enforcing microchipping requirements, 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*:**

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None – all dog keepers in NI, and database providers, regardless of political opinion, will be required to meet requirements regarding dog microchipping. Local councils will remain responsible for enforcing microchipping requirements, 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*:**

None – all dog keepers in NI, and database providers, regardless of race, will be required to meet requirements regarding dog microchipping. Local councils will remain responsible for enforcing microchipping requirements, regardless of race.

What is the level of impact? Minor  Major  None

(select as appropriate)

**Details of the likely policy impacts on *Age*:**

None – all dog keepers in NI, and database providers, regardless of age, will be required to meet requirements regarding dog microchipping. Local councils will remain responsible for enforcing microchipping requirements, regardless of age.

**What is the level of impact?** Minor  Major  None

(select as appropriate)

**Details of the likely policy impacts on *Marital Status*:**

None – all dog keepers in NI, and database providers, regardless of marital status, will be required to meet requirements regarding dog microchipping. Local councils will remain responsible for enforcing microchipping requirements, regardless of marital status.

**What is the level of impact?** Minor  Major  None

(select as appropriate)

**Details of the likely policy impacts on *Sexual Orientation*:**

None – all dog keepers in NI, and database providers, regardless of sexual orientation, will be required to meet requirements regarding dog microchipping. Local councils will remain responsible for enforcing microchipping requirements, regardless of sexual orientation.

**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 keepers in NI, and database providers, regardless of being men/women, will be required to meet requirements regarding dog microchipping. Local councils will remain responsible for enforcing microchipping requirements, regardless of being men/women.

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**What is the level of impact?** Minor  Major  None

(select as appropriate)

**Details of the likely policy impacts on *Disability*:**

None – all dog keepers in NI, and database providers, regardless of disability, will be required to meet requirements regarding dog microchipping. Consideration was given to the potential impact on keepers of assistance dogs, however, as these dogs complete the necessary processes prior to placement, the proposed policy is assessed as having no adverse impacts on this group. Local councils will remain responsible for enforcing microchipping requirements, regardless of disability.

**What is the level of impact?** Minor  Major  None

(select as appropriate)

**Details of the likely policy impacts on *Dependants*:**

None – all dog keepers in NI, and database providers, regardless of dependants, will be required to meet requirements regarding dog microchipping. Local councils will remain responsible for enforcing microchipping requirements, regardless of dependants.

**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?**

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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:**

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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:**

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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:**

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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 opinions.

**What is the level of impact?** Minor  Major  None

(select as appropriate)

**Details of the likely policy impacts on *Racial Group*:**

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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:**

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:**

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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.

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Current dog microchipping policy applies, equally, to all persons who keep dogs, and the proposed revised microchipping requirements will also apply to all persons equally.

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 Life & Times survey 2024; the Dogs Trust's National Dog Survey 2025, and NI council dog statistics (published on the DAERA website). An Equality and Human Rights Screening Exercise has been undertaken, which assessed this evidence relating to s75 considerations, including equality of opportunity and good relations, and Disability Duties and Human Rights.

This 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 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          |
| <b>Total score</b>                                   | 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.

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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.*

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**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 consider all comments generated from 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 consider all comments generated from the public consultation, including any evidence relating to impacts on good relations 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 consider all comments generated from the public consultation, including any evidence relating to impacts on disability duties 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   | <b>Article 2</b>  | Yes/No |
| Prohibition of torture, inhuman or degrading treatment                | <b>Article 3</b>  | Yes/No |
| Prohibition of slavery and forced labour                              | <b>Article 4</b>  | Yes/No |
| Right to liberty and security   | <b>Article 5</b>  | Yes/No |
| Right to a fair and public trial                                      | <b>Article 6</b>  | Yes/No |
| Right to no punishment without law                                    | <b>Article 7</b>  | Yes/No |
| Right to respect for private and family life, home and correspondence | <b>Article 8</b>  | Yes/No |
| Right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion                  | <b>Article 9</b>  | Yes/No |
| Right to freedom of expression  | <b>Article 10</b> | Yes/No |

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|   |                                 |        |
|---|---------------------------------|--------|
| Right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association | <b>Article 11</b>               | Yes/No |
| Right to marry and to found a family                  | <b>Article 12</b>               | Yes/No |
| The prohibition of discrimination                     | <b>Article 14</b>               | Yes/No |
| Protection of property and enjoyment of possessions   | <b>Protocol 1<br/>Article 1</b> | Yes/No |
| Right to education                                    | <b>Protocol 1<br/>Article 2</b> | Yes/No |
| Right to free and secret elections                    | <b>Protocol 1<br/>Article 3</b> | Yes/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: Brenda Kelly**

**Grade: DP**

**Branch: Animal Welfare and Dog**

**Date: 26 March 2026**

**Control Policy Branch**

**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.**

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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](mailto: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](mailto:equality@daera-ni.gov.uk)

Tel: 028 7744 2027



An Roinn  
**Talmhaíochta, Comhshaoil  
agus Gnóthaí Tuaithe**

Department o'  
**Fairmin, Environment  
an' Kintra Matthers**

## 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

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- 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](mailto:equality@daera-ni.gov.uk)



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

**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.

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>Will the policy be reviewed?</b> Yes | <b>If applicable, set review date:</b> 5-10 years post implementation |
|---|---|

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

|   |                              |  |
|---|------------------------------|--|
| <b>Does Implementation go beyond minimum EU requirements?</b> | YES <input type="checkbox"/> | NO <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
|---|------------------------------|--|

|  |   |   |  |   |
|--|---|---|--|---|
| <b>Is this measure likely to impact on trade and investment?</b> |   |   | <b>YES</b> <input type="checkbox"/>  | <b>NO</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>                                       |
| <b>Are any of these organisations in scope?</b>                  | <b>Micro</b><br>Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> | <b>Small</b><br>Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> | <b>Medium</b><br>Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> | <b>Large</b><br>Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> |

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

**ECONOMIC ASSESSMENT (Option 1)**

| Costs (£m)    | Total Transitional (Policy) |       | Average Annual (recurring)<br>(excl. transitional) (constant price) | Total Cost<br>(Present Value) |
|---------------|-----------------------------|-------|---|-------------------------------|
|               | (constant price)            | Years |   |                               |
| 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) |       | Average Annual (recurring)<br>(excl. transitional) (constant price) | Total Benefit<br>(Present Value) |
|---------------|-----------------------------|-------|---|----------------------------------|
|               | (constant price)            | Years |   |                                  |
| 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)<br>(constant price) | Years | Average Annual (recurring)<br>(excl. transitional) (constant price) | Total Cost<br>(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)<br>(constant price) | Years | Average Annual (recurring)<br>(excl. transitional) (constant price) | Total Benefit<br>(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) |          | Average Annual (recurring)<br>(excl. transitional) (constant price) | Total Cost<br>(Present Value) |
|----------------------|-----------------------------|----------|---|-------------------------------|
|                      | (constant price)            | Years    |   |                               |
| <b>Low</b>           | <b>£432k</b>                | <b>1</b> | <b>£2.07M</b>   | <b>£2.5M</b>                  |
| <b>High</b>          | <b>£666.5k</b>              |          | <b>£3.89M</b>   | <b>£4.5M</b>                  |
| <b>Best Estimate</b> |                             |          |   |                               |

**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) |       | Average Annual (recurring)<br>(excl. transitional) (constant price) | Total Benefit<br>(Present Value) |
|----------------------|-----------------------------|-------|---|----------------------------------|
|                      | (constant price)            | Years |   |                                  |
| <b>Low</b>           | <b>Optional</b>             |       | <b>Optional</b>   | <b>Optional</b>                  |
| <b>High</b>          | <b>Optional</b>             |       | <b>Optional</b>   | <b>Optional</b>                  |
| <b>Best Estimate</b> |                             |       |   |                                  |

**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 )**

|   |                  |             |
|---|------------------|-------------|
| <b>Direct Impact on business (Equivalent Annual) £m</b> |                  |             |
| <b>Costs:</b>   | <b>Benefits:</b> | <b>Net:</b> |

**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)**

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

**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.

| <b>Benefits (£m)</b> | <b>Total Transitional (Policy)</b><br>(constant price) Years | <b>Average Annual (recurring)</b><br>(excl. transitional) (constant price) | <b>Total Benefit</b><br>(Present Value) |
|----------------------|--|--|---|
| <b>Low</b>           | <b>Optional</b>  | <b>Optional</b>  | <b>Optional</b>                         |
| <b>High</b>          | <b>Optional</b>  | <b>Optional</b>  | <b>Optional</b>                         |
| <b>Best Estimate</b> |  |  |   |

**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 |                  |             |
|--|------------------|-------------|
| <b>Costs:</b>                                    | <b>Benefits:</b> | <b>Net:</b> |
|  |                  |             |

**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 licencing**

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)<sup>1</sup> £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

<sup>1</sup> [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 I - 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 | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Strategy | <input type="checkbox"/> | Plan | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Adopting a                  | Policy | <input type="checkbox"/>            | Strategy | <input type="checkbox"/> | Plan | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Implementing a              | Policy | <input type="checkbox"/>            | Strategy | <input type="checkbox"/> | Plan | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Revising a                  | Policy | <input type="checkbox"/>            | Strategy | <input type="checkbox"/> | Plan | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Designing a Public Service  |        | <input type="checkbox"/>            |          |                          |      |                          |
| Delivering a Public Service |        | <input type="checkbox"/>            |          |                          |      |                          |

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).

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  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                                    | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Rural Tourism                                       | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Rural Housing                                       | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Jobs or Employment in Rural Areas                   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Education or Training in Rural Areas                | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Broadband or Mobile Communications in Rural Areas   | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Transport Services or Infrastructure in Rural Areas | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Health or Social Care Services in Rural Areas       | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Poverty in Rural Areas                              | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Deprivation in Rural Areas                          | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Rural Crime or Community Safety                     | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Rural Development                                   | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Agri-Environment                                    | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Other (Please state)                                | <input type="text"/>                |

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   | <input type="checkbox"/> | Published Statistics | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Consultation with Other Organisations  | <input type="checkbox"/> | Research Papers      | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Surveys or Questionnaires  | <input type="checkbox"/> | Other Publications   | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Other Methods or Information Sources (include details in Question 3C below). |                          |                      | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |

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<sup>1</sup>, EU proposed legislation on the Welfare of Dogs and Cats and their traceability<sup>2</sup>.

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  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.



|  |   |
|--|---|
| 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:                                   |  |
| Date:  | 14 April 2026   |

# Equality & Disability Duties Screening Template

December 2023 version



**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.

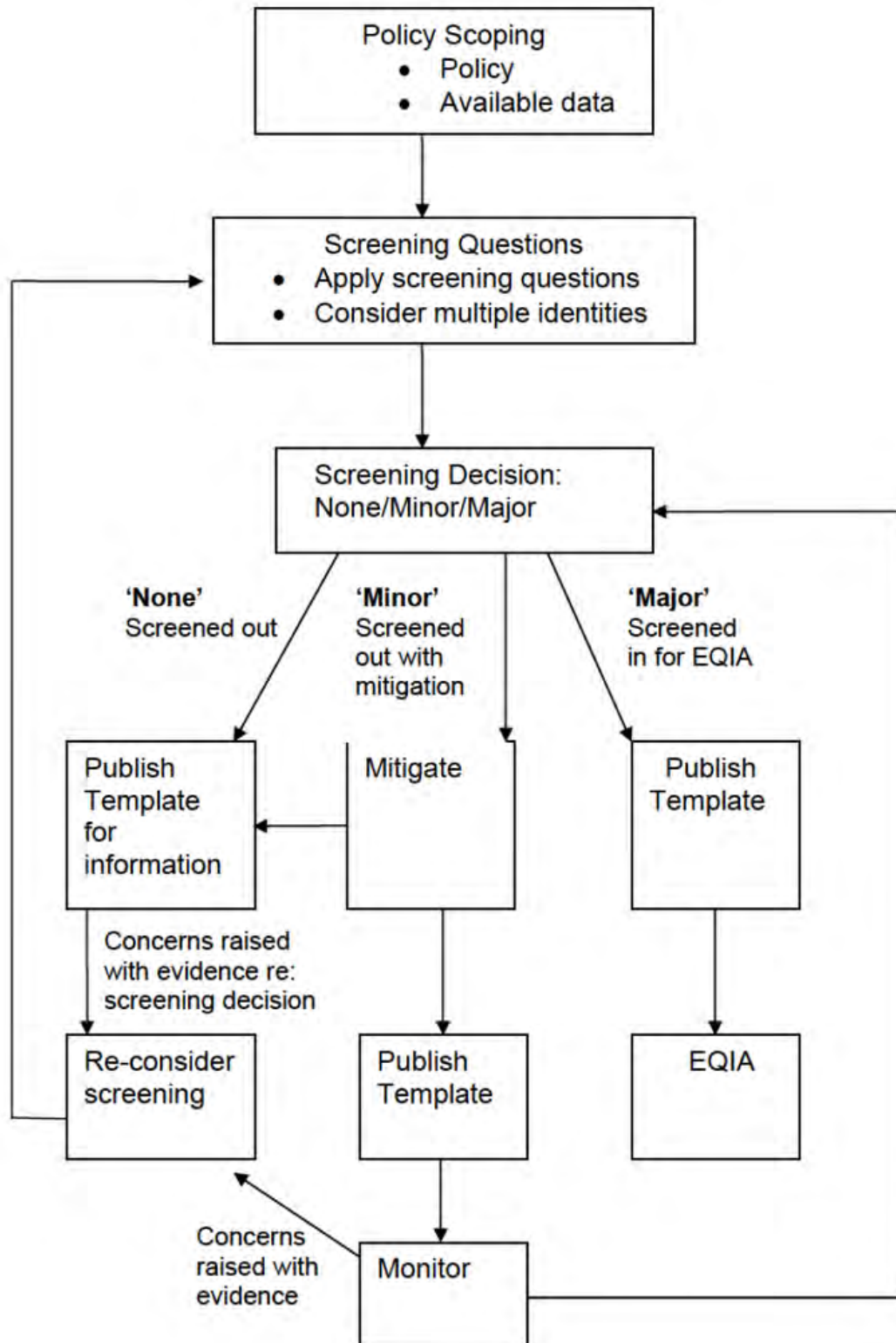
**Part 4. Monitoring** – provides guidance to public authorities on monitoring for adverse impact and broader monitoring.

**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.

Equality & Disability Duties – Screening Template

**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)

## Equality &amp; Disability Duties – Screening Template

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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?**

## Equality &amp; Disability Duties – Screening Template

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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

## Equality &amp; Disability Duties – Screening Template

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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

## Equality &amp; Disability Duties – Screening Template

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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.

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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.

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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**

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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

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- 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;

## Equality &amp; Disability Duties – Screening Template

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- 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*.**

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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*:**

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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*:**

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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:**

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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

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**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

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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.

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**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.**

## Equality &amp; Disability Duties – Screening Template

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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.

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**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          |

## Equality &amp; Disability Duties – Screening Template

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| 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   | <b>Article 2</b>  | Yes/No |
| Prohibition of torture, inhuman or degrading treatment                | <b>Article 3</b>  | Yes/No |
| Prohibition of slavery and forced labour                              | <b>Article 4</b>  | Yes/No |
| Right to liberty and security   | <b>Article 5</b>  | Yes/No |
| Right to a fair and public trial                                      | <b>Article 6</b>  | Yes/No |
| Right to no punishment without law                                    | <b>Article 7</b>  | Yes/No |
| Right to respect for private and family life, home and correspondence | <b>Article 8</b>  | Yes/No |
| Right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion                  | <b>Article 9</b>  | Yes/No |
| Right to freedom of expression  | <b>Article 10</b> | Yes/No |

## Equality &amp; Disability Duties – Screening Template

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|   |                                 |        |
|---|---------------------------------|--------|
| Right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association | <b>Article 11</b>               | Yes/No |
| Right to marry and to found a family                  | <b>Article 12</b>               | Yes/No |
| The prohibition of discrimination                     | <b>Article 14</b>               | Yes/No |
| Protection of property and enjoyment of possessions   | <b>Protocol 1<br/>Article 1</b> | Yes/No |
| Right to education                                    | <b>Protocol 1<br/>Article 2</b> | Yes/No |
| Right to free and secret elections                    | <b>Protocol 1<br/>Article 3</b> | 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

**Date:** 24 March 2026

**Control Policy Branch**

**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.

## Equality &amp; Disability Duties – Screening Template

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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](mailto: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](mailto:equality@daera-ni.gov.uk)

Tel: 028 7744 2027



An Roinn  
Talmhaíochta, Comhshaoil  
agus Gnóthaí Tuaithe

Department of  
Fairmin, Environment  
an' Kintra Matthers

## 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

## Equality &amp; Disability Duties – Screening Template

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- 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](mailto:equality@daera-ni.gov.uk)



|  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>Title:</b><br>Proposal to ban specific aversive training devices for cats and dogs in Northern Ireland.           | <b>Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA)</b>   |
|  | <b>Date:</b> April 2026   |
|  | <b>Type of measure:</b> Secondary Legislation   |
| <b>Lead department or agency:</b><br>Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA/the Department) | <b>Stage:</b> Initial   |
|  | <b>Source of intervention:</b> Domestic NI  |
| <b>Other departments or agencies:</b><br>N/A   | <b>Contact details:</b> Animal Welfare and Dog Control Policy Branch  |
|  | Animal Welfare and Dog Control Policy Branch<br>DAERA<br>Jubilee House<br>111 Ballykelly Road<br>Limavady<br>BT49 9HP |
|  | <a href="mailto:animalwelfarepolicy@daera-ni.gov.uk">animalwelfarepolicy@daera-ni.gov.uk</a>                          |

**Summary Intervention and Options**

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>What is the problem under consideration? Why is government intervention necessary? (7 lines maximum)</b><br>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. |   |
| <b>What are the policy objectives and the intended effects? (7 lines maximum)</b><br>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.  |   |
| <b>What policy options have been considered, including any alternatives to regulation? Please justify preferred option (further details in Evidence Base) (10 lines maximum)</b><br><br>The following options were considered: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Option 1</b> – Do nothing and rely on existing animal welfare legislation</li> <li>• <b>Option 2</b> – Issue guidance discouraging aversive devices</li> <li>• <b>Option 3A</b> – Ban handheld e-collars and containment fence systems</li> <li>• <b>Option 3B</b> – Ban handheld e-collars, choke collars and prong collars (<i>preferred option</i>)</li> <li>• <b>Option 4</b> – Comprehensive ban on all aversive devices</li> </ul> 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.   |   |
| <b>Will the policy be reviewed?</b> It will be reviewed   | <b>If applicable, set review date:</b> March 2031 |

**Cost of Preferred (or more likely) Option**

|  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| <b>Total outlay cost for business<br/>£m</b> | <b>Total net cost to business per<br/>year £m</b> | <b>Annual cost for implementation<br/>by Regulator £m</b> |
|  |   |   |

|   |  |                                    |
|---|--|------------------------------------|
| <b>Does Implementation go beyond minimum EU requirements?</b> | <b>YES</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <b>NO</b> <input type="checkbox"/> |
|---|--|------------------------------------|

|  |                                     |   |
|--|-------------------------------------|---|
| <b>Is this measure likely to impact on trade and investment?</b> | <b>YES</b> <input type="checkbox"/> | <b>NO</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
|--|-------------------------------------|---|

|   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| <b>Are any of these<br/>organisations in scope?</b> | <b>Micro</b>  | <b>Small</b>  | <b>Medium</b>   | <b>Large</b>  |
|   | Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> | Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> | Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> | Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> |

**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) |       | Average Annual (recurring) | Total Cost |
|---------------|-----------------------------|-------|----------------------------|------------|
|               | (constant price)            | Years |                            |            |
| 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) |       | Average Annual (recurring) | Total Benefit |
|---------------|-----------------------------|-------|----------------------------|---------------|
|               | (constant price)            | Years |                            |               |
| 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 )**

|   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| <b>Direct Impact on business (Equivalent Annual) £m</b> |  |  |
|---|--|--|

|               |                  |             |  |  |
|---------------|------------------|-------------|--|--|
| <b>Costs:</b> | <b>Benefits:</b> | <b>Net:</b> |  |  |
|---------------|------------------|-------------|--|--|

**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) |       | Average Annual (recurring)<br>(excl. transitional) (constant price) | Total Cost<br>(Present Value) |
|----------------------|-----------------------------|-------|---|-------------------------------|
|                      | (constant price)            | Years |   |                               |
| Low                  | Optional                    |       | Optional  | Optional                      |
| High                 | Optional                    |       | Optional  | Optional                      |
| <b>Best Estimate</b> |                             |       |   |                               |

**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) |       | Average Annual (recurring)<br>(excl. transitional) (constant price) | Total Benefit<br>(Present Value) |
|----------------------|-----------------------------|-------|---|----------------------------------|
|                      | (constant price)            | Years |   |                                  |
| Low                  | 0                           |       | 0   | 0                                |
| High                 | 0                           |       | 0   | 0                                |
| <b>Best Estimate</b> | 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 )**

|   |                  |             |  |
|---|------------------|-------------|--|
| <b>Direct Impact on business (Equivalent Annual) £m</b> |                  |             |  |
| <b>Costs:</b>   | <b>Benefits:</b> | <b>Net:</b> |  |

**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) |       | Average Annual (recurring)<br>(excl. transitional) (constant price) | Total Cost<br>(Present Value) |
|----------------------|-----------------------------|-------|---|-------------------------------|
|                      | (constant price)            | Years |   |                               |
| Low                  | Optional                    |       | Optional  | Optional                      |
| High                 | Optional                    |       | Optional  | Optional                      |
| <b>Best Estimate</b> |                             |       |   |                               |

**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) |       | Average Annual (recurring)<br>(excl. transitional) (constant price) | Total Benefit<br>(Present Value) |
|----------------------|-----------------------------|-------|---|----------------------------------|
|                      | (constant price)            | Years |   |                                  |
| Low                  | Optional                    |       | Optional  | Optional                         |
| High                 | Optional                    |       | Optional  | Optional                         |
| <b>Best Estimate</b> |                             |       |   |                                  |

**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 )**

|   |                  |             |  |  |
|---|------------------|-------------|--|--|
| <b>Direct Impact on business (Equivalent Annual) £m</b> |                  |             |  |  |
| <b>Costs:</b>   | <b>Benefits:</b> | <b>Net:</b> |  |  |

**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) |       | Average Annual (recurring)<br>(excl. transitional) (constant price) | Total Cost<br>(Present Value) |
|----------------------|-----------------------------|-------|---|-------------------------------|
|                      | (constant price)            | Years |   |                               |
| Low                  | Optional                    |       | Optional  | Optional                      |
| High                 | Optional                    |       | Optional  | Optional                      |
| <b>Best Estimate</b> |                             |       |   |                               |

**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) |       | Average Annual (recurring)<br>(excl. transitional) (constant price) | Total Benefit<br>(Present Value) |
|----------------------|-----------------------------|-------|---|----------------------------------|
|                      | (constant price)            | Years |   |                                  |
| Low                  | Optional                    |       | Optional  | Optional                         |
| High                 | Optional                    |       | Optional  | Optional                         |
| <b>Best Estimate</b> |                             |       |   |                                  |

**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 )**

|   |                  |             |  |  |
|---|------------------|-------------|--|--|
| <b>Direct Impact on business (Equivalent Annual) £m</b> |                  |             |  |  |
| <b>Costs:</b>   | <b>Benefits:</b> | <b>Net:</b> |  |  |

**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) |       | Average Annual (recurring) | Total Cost |
|---------------|-----------------------------|-------|----------------------------|------------|
|               | (constant price)            | Years |                            |            |
| 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) |       | Average Annual (recurring) | Total Benefit |
|---------------|-----------------------------|-------|----------------------------|---------------|
|               | (constant price)            | Years |                            |               |
| 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 )**

|   |                  |             |  |  |
|---|------------------|-------------|--|--|
| <b>Direct Impact on business (Equivalent Annual) £m</b> |                  |             |  |  |
| <b>Costs:</b>   | <b>Benefits:</b> | <b>Net:</b> |  |  |

**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 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 I - 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 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Strategy <input type="checkbox"/> | Plan <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Adopting a                  | Policy <input type="checkbox"/>            | Strategy <input type="checkbox"/> | Plan <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Implementing a              | Policy <input type="checkbox"/>            | Strategy <input type="checkbox"/> | Plan <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Revising a                  | Policy <input type="checkbox"/>            | Strategy <input type="checkbox"/> | Plan <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Designing a Public Service  | <input type="checkbox"/>                   |                                   |                               |
| Delivering a Public Service | <input type="checkbox"/>                   |                                   |                               |

#### 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). | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Other Definition (Provide details and the rationale below).     | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| A definition of 'rural' is not applicable.                      | <input type="checkbox"/>            |

*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  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                                    | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Rural Tourism                                       | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Rural Housing                                       | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Jobs or Employment in Rural Areas                   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Education or Training in Rural Areas                | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Broadband or Mobile Communications in Rural Areas   | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Transport Services or Infrastructure in Rural Areas | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Health or Social Care Services in Rural Areas       | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Poverty in Rural Areas                              | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Deprivation in Rural Areas                          | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Rural Crime or Community Safety                     | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Rural Development                                   | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Agri-Environment                                    | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Other (Please state)                                | <input type="text"/>                |

**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   | <input type="checkbox"/> | Published Statistics | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Consultation with Other Organisations  | <input type="checkbox"/> | Research Papers      | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Surveys or Questionnaires  | <input type="checkbox"/> | Other Publications   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Other Methods or Information Sources (include details in Question 3C below). |                          |                      | <input type="checkbox"/>            |

**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  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.



|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>Rural Needs Impact Assessment undertaken by:</b> | Colin Stewart   |
| <b>Position/Grade:</b>                              | Staff Officer   |
| <b>Division/Branch</b>                              | Animal Identification & Welfare Branch  |
| <b>Signature:</b>                                   | Colin Stewart   |
| <b>Date:</b>  | 13/03/26  |
| <b>Rural Needs Impact Assessment approved by:</b>   | Catherine Goligher  |
| <b>Position/Grade:</b>                              | Grade 7   |
| <b>Division/Branch:</b>                             | Animal Welfare and Dog Control Policy Branch  |
| <b>Signature:</b>                                   |  |
| <b>Date:</b>  | 14 April 2026   |

# Equality & Disability Duties Screening Template

## December 2023 version



**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.

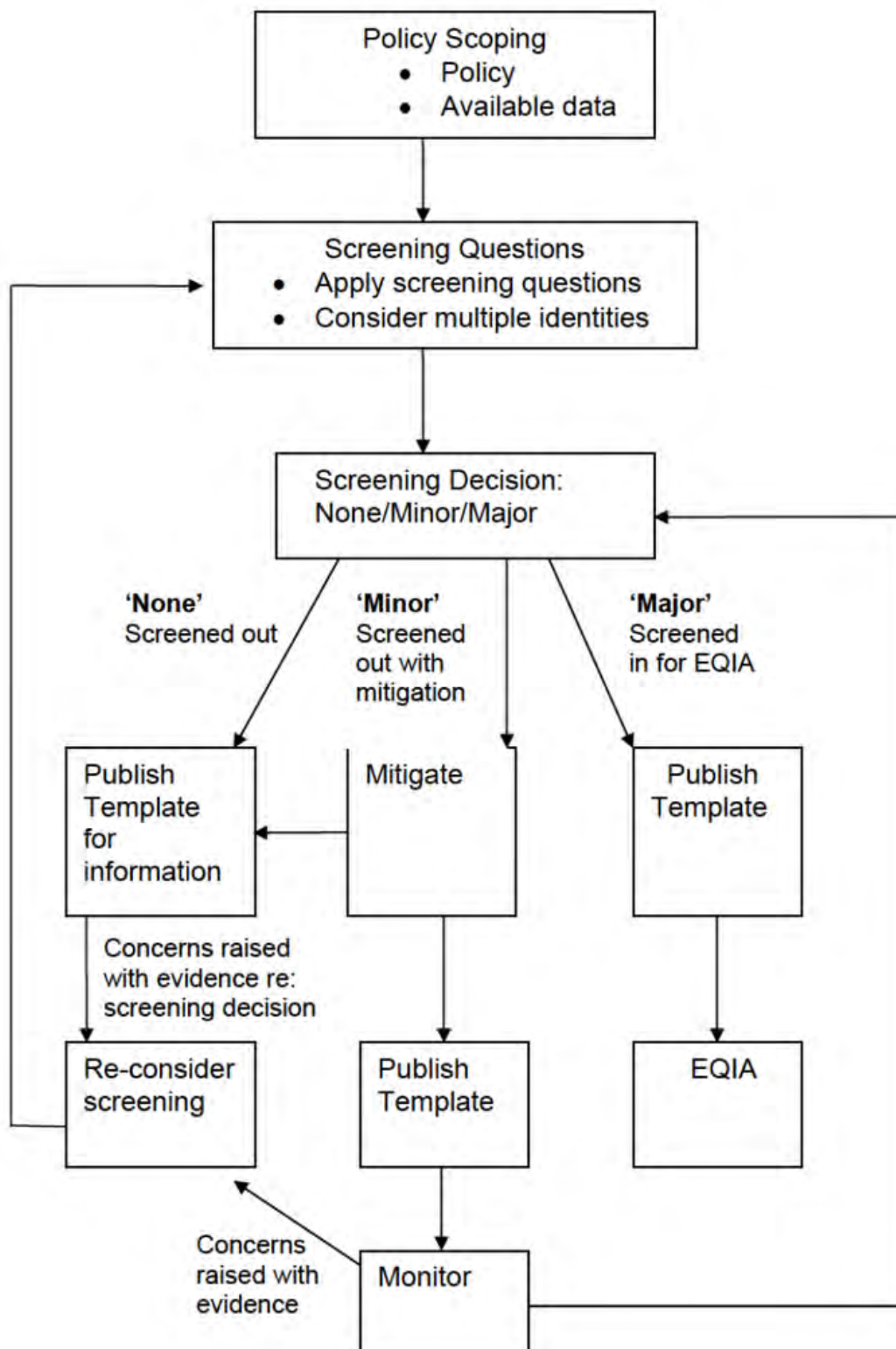
**Part 3. Screening decision** – guides the public authority to reach a screening decision as to whether or not there is a need to carry out an equality impact assessment (EQIA), or to introduce measures to mitigate the likely impact, or the introduction of an alternative policy to better promote equality 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

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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**

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**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.

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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:**

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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,

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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<sup>1</sup> 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<sup>2</sup> indicates that 6,512 people from Northern Ireland responded to its survey about dogs. The survey did not include information about sexual orientation.

<sup>1</sup> [NDS 2025 State of the nation report desktop version.pdf](#)

<sup>2</sup> [NDS 2025 State of the nation report desktop version.pdf](#)

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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<sup>3</sup> 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:**

<sup>3</sup> [NDS 2025 State of the nation report desktop version.pdf](#)

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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<sup>4</sup> 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

<sup>4</sup> [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<sup>5</sup> 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?**

<sup>5</sup> [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

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**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**

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- 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.

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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:**

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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

## Equality &amp; Disability Duties – Screening Template

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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

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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

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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

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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)

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**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:**

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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.**

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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          |
| <b>Total score</b>                                   | 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.

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**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.**

## Equality &amp; Disability Duties – Screening Template

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See Annex A for brief synopsis on each of the Human Rights Articles & Protocols.

|   |                                 |        |
|---|---------------------------------|--------|
| Right to Life   | <b>Article 2</b>                | Yes/No |
| Prohibition of torture, inhuman or degrading treatment                | <b>Article 3</b>                | Yes/No |
| Prohibition of slavery and forced labour                              | <b>Article 4</b>                | Yes/No |
| Right to liberty and security   | <b>Article 5</b>                | Yes/No |
| Right to a fair and public trial                                      | <b>Article 6</b>                | Yes/No |
| Right to no punishment without law                                    | <b>Article 7</b>                | Yes/No |
| Right to respect for private and family life, home and correspondence | <b>Article 8</b>                | Yes/No |
| Right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion                  | <b>Article 9</b>                | Yes/No |
| Right to freedom of expression  | <b>Article 10</b>               | Yes/No |
| Right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association                 | <b>Article 11</b>               | Yes/No |
| Right to marry and to found a family                                  | <b>Article 12</b>               | Yes/No |
| The prohibition of discrimination                                     | <b>Article 14</b>               | Yes/No |
| Protection of property and enjoyment of possessions                   | <b>Protocol 1<br/>Article 1</b> | Yes/No |

## Equality &amp; Disability Duties – Screening Template

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|                                    |                                 |        |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------|
| Right to education                 | <b>Protocol 1<br/>Article 2</b> | Yes/No |
| Right to free and secret elections | <b>Protocol 1<br/>Article 3</b> | 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

## Equality &amp; Disability Duties – Screening Template

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**Screening assessment completed by (Staff Officer level or above) -****Name: Chris Wade****Grade: DP****Branch: Animal Welfare and Dog****Date: 12 March 2026****Control Policy Branch****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](mailto: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

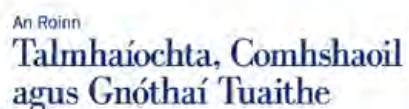
111 Ballykelly Road

LIMAVADY

BT49 9HP

Email: [equality@daera-ni.gov.uk](mailto: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

## Equality &amp; Disability Duties – Screening Template

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- 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](mailto:equality@daera-ni.gov.uk)



Department of

**Agriculture, Environment  
and Rural Affairs**

[www.daera-ni.gov.uk](http://www.daera-ni.gov.uk)

An Roinn

**Talmhaíochta, Comhshaoil  
agus Gnóthaí Tuaithe**

Department o'

**Fairmin, Environment  
an' Kintra Matthers**

|                            |   |
|----------------------------|---|
| <b>Council/Committee:</b>  | <b>Neighbourhood &amp; Communities</b>        |
| <b>Date:</b>               | 16 June 2026                                  |
| <b>Report Title:</b>       | <b>Tobacco and Vapes Act 2026</b>             |
| <b>Publication Status:</b> | Open  |
| <b>Author:</b>             | Clement Kennedy, Environmental Health Manager |
| <b>Approver:</b>           | Matt McDowell, Director of People             |

## 1. Purpose

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to inform the Council of the enactment of the Tobacco and Vapes 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.

## 2. Background

- 2.1. The 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.
- 2.2. 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.
- 2.3. The Tobacco and Vapes 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.

## 3. Key Issues for Consideration

- 3.1. The 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. While adults who can legally purchase tobacco today will

still be able to do so, current smokers are being strongly encouraged to quit.

- 3.2. From 29 October 2026, it will also be illegal to sell non-nicotine vapes and other nicotine products to under 18s. There will also be a ban on proxy purchasing of vaping and nicotine products on behalf of under 18s. The legislation will provide new powers to reduce the harm from second-hand smoke and improved regulation of retailers of vapes and nicotine products.
- 3.3. 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
- 3.4. On a date to be appointed by the Northern Ireland Health Minister, the Northern Ireland Tobacco Retailers Register will be extended to include businesses selling vapes and other nicotine products. In the longer term, further retail licensing provisions will be introduced.
- 3.5. 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>
- 3.6. The Tobacco and Vapes Act represents a significant step forward in protecting public health, reducing health inequalities and preventing nicotine addiction among future generations. 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>
- 3.7. Representatives from Councils, including Mid and East Antrim Borough Council are currently working at pace 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.
- 3.8. The Council is asked to note the enactment of the Tobacco and Vapes Act as it strengthens the Council's ability to protect public health, particularly by preventing children and young people from starting to smoke or vape. For local government, the Act provides a clearer legislative framework for enforcement, enabling Enforcement officers to

take earlier and more effective action to safeguard communities and promote healthier lives for current and future generations.

#### **4. General Considerations / Implications**

- 4.1. Financial implications: No direct financial resource.
- 4.2. Human Resources: The new legislation will be enforced using the existing Environmental Health staff resource, which includes the Tobacco Control Officer role, currently funded by the Public Health Agency.
- 4.3. Equality Screening: 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. Neutral impact across all Section 75 groups.
- 4.4. Assets: No direct asset impact
- 4.5. Alignment with Corporate Priorities and Link to Corporate Plan: Aligned with corporate objectives
- 4.6. Rural Proofing and Environmental Impact: Any rural needs implications will be identified using the Council's screening process.

#### **5 Proposed Way Forward**

- 5.1 Officers from Councils including Mid and East Antrim Borough Council will continue to work with the Department of Health and Public Health Agency through the Tobacco and Vapes Joint Implementation Group to prepare for the implementation of the phases of the Act and associated regulations.

#### **6 Recommendation or Decision**

- 6.1 Elected Members are asked to note the information provided on the enactment of the Tobacco and Vapes Act, and the key provisions and implementation arrangements outlined within this report.

#### **7 Appendices / Link**

<https://www.stopsmokingni.info>



**Mid & East  
Antrim**  
Borough Council

<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/tobacco-and-vapes-bill-documents>



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|----------------------------|---|
| <b>Council/Committee:</b>  | <b>Neighbourhoods &amp; Communities</b>       |
| <b>Date:</b>               | 16 June 2026                                  |
| <b>Report Title:</b>       | Registration of Skin Piercing Businesses      |
| <b>Publication Status:</b> | Open  |
| <b>Author:</b>             | Clement Kennedy, Environmental Health Manager |
| <b>Approver:</b>           | Matt McDowell, Director of People             |

## 1. Purpose

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to seek Elected Members approval for the registration of one business under the Council's Skin Piercing Bye Laws.

## 2. Background

- 2.1. Under the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) (NI) Order 1985, the Council is responsible for registering and regulating businesses which carry out skin piercing. This can include ear piercing, cosmetic piercing, semi-permanent skin colouring, tattooing, acupuncture and electrolysis.
- 2.2. Mid and East Antrim Borough Council in pursuance of section 90 (c) of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 1972 and Article 14(7) of the 1985 Order set byelaws for the purposes of securing the cleanliness of premises registered under Article 14 of Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Northern Ireland) Order 1985. These byelaws set out the requirements regarding fittings in those premises and of registered persons and persons assisting them and the cleansing and so far as appropriate sterilisation of instruments, materials and equipment used in connection with the businesses of skin piercing activities.

## 3. Key Issues for Consideration

- 3.1. An application for registration has been received from the following premise to be registered under the byelaws for a skin piercing practice:
  - Darren Kerr, Sinjin Ink, Unit 4 Raceview Mill, 29 Raceview Road, Broughshane for tattooing.

Inspection of the premise has found that the fittings and facilities were satisfactory. There were also suitable arrangements for ensuring sterilisation of any instruments, materials and equipment used in skin piercing activities. The requirements of Mid and East Antrim Borough Council Skin Piercing Bye Laws 2015 were found to have been fulfilled.

- 3.2. The premises will be inspected routinely to ensure compliance with Council Skin Piercing Bye Laws.

#### **4. General Considerations / Implications**

- 4.1. Financial implications: No direct financial resource.
- 4.2. Human Resources: No direct staffing resources.
- 4.3. Equality Screening: Any equality implications will be identified using the Council's screening process
- 4.4. Assets: No direct asset impact
- 4.5. Alignment with Corporate Priorities and Link to Corporate Plan: Aligned with corporate objectives
- 4.6. Rural Proofing and Environmental Impact: Any rural needs implications will be identified using the Council's screening process.

#### **5. Proposed Way Forward**

- 5.1 Officers are satisfied that registration can proceed on the basis that all requirements under the appropriate bye laws in relation to the application listed within this report have been met.

#### **6. Recommendation or Decision**

- 6.1. Elected Members are asked to grant approval to register the following business under the Council's Skin Piercing Byelaws:
  - (i) Darren Kerr, Sinjin Ink, Unit 4 Raceview Mill, 29 Raceview Road, Broughshane - for the business of tattooing.

#### **7. Appendices / Links**

## Forward Plan – Neighbourhoods & Community Committee

### 1. Planned agenda items Next meeting 3 August 2026

| Items                                   | Purpose | Report by: |
|---|---------|------------|
| Gobbins sub-committee minutes June 2026 | Noting  |            |

### 2. Future Meetings

#### Planned agenda items 15 September 2026

| Items  | Purpose | Report by: |
|--|---------|------------|
| Presentation - NIHE annual update of the 2023-26 Housing Investment Plan |         |            |

#### Planned agenda items 20 October 2026

| Items  | Purpose | Report by: |
|--|---------|------------|
| Presentation - DfI Roads annual presentation |         |            |

### 3. Items to be programmed

| Item                                   | Purpose  |
|--|--|
| Terms of Reference                     | Updates as and when required   |
| Grant Awards Quarterly Updates         |  |
| Environment Fund                       | If funding is secured, progress project – business case                    |
| Leisure Transformation                 | Update on progress with filling new structure                              |
| Animal Welfare Service                 | Update on funding post JR.<br>Approval to adopt new delivery/funding model |
| Museum Accreditation of Arthur Cottage | To update Elected Members on application for accreditation                 |
| Flag Requests                          | As and when required   |
| Drinking water update                  |  |