

Consultation on new rules for selling and supplying puppies and kittens

Summary of Responses and Way Forward

February 2026



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

An Roinn

**Talmhaíochta, Comhshaoil
agus Gnóthaí Tuaithe**

Department o'

**Fairmin, Environment
an' Kintra Matthers**

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Chapter 1: Introduction



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The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs ('the Department') launched a twelve-week public consultation on 2 June 2025 to seek views on proposals for new rules for selling and supplying puppies and kittens in Northern Ireland. It wishes to thank all stakeholders and members of the public who took the time to respond to the consultation.

The consultation closed on 25 August 2025, and 488 responses were received. This included 457 responses via the online consultation tool, Citizen Space, and 31 responses via email. Responses were received from a wide range of stakeholders, including 447 responses from members of the public; 20 from animal welfare organisations; three from pet advertising platforms; one from a veterinary association; one from a university-affiliated researcher; one from a membership organisation for rural interests; one from a professional body for licensing practitioners; one from a membership organisation representing farmers; one from an organisation responsible for maintaining pedigree records; seven from local government in Northern Ireland; and five from organisations, who requested anonymity.

A list of the organisations who agreed to be named can be found at Appendix A.

While most respondents provided clear answers to the consultation questions, some did not. All comments have been considered and reflected where appropriate, however their responses are unable to be accounted for in the quantitative analysis. Responses from individuals and anonymous organisations are treated confidentially, while those from organisations and charities are generally attributed. This document is not intended to be a comprehensive report of every view expressed by consultees but rather a broad summary of the issues raised by respondents and the Department's next steps.



Chapter 2: Background





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The third-party sale of puppies and kittens (under six months of age) poses several significant problems including poor animal welfare; increased risk of illness and disease; encouragement of irresponsible breeders through a focus on profit over animal welfare; as well as ethical concerns.

Despite frequent and high-profile education and information campaigns on sourcing from a reputable breeder, people continue to unwittingly purchase puppies from unscrupulous breeders and from sellers who did not breed the animal themselves. Some new owners are not aware of where their new pet came from and, in terms of the animals themselves, young animals sold in this way can go on to suffer welfare issues, the effects of which continue for the rest of their lives.

Unlike the rest of the UK, sales of puppies and kittens in Northern Ireland are largely unregulated. The Department therefore proposed, as set out in its consultation document, new rules for the sale and supply of puppies and kittens. The consultation document set out a series of questions relating to a proposed system whereby sellers and suppliers would be required to register with their local council; pay a registration fee; and meet specified conditions of registration.



Chapter 3: Key Findings



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Overall, the majority of respondents supported the Department's proposals on regulating the sale and transfer of puppies and kittens in Northern Ireland. The key findings from the responses are as follows:

- 85% agreed that individuals transferring ownership of puppies should register with their local council, and 88% felt the same for kittens.
- There was strong backing for the proposed conditions of registration (82%) and for mandatory information to be included in advertisements (83%).
- 83% supported creating an online public register of sellers and suppliers.
- 70% agreed with exemptions for certain groups, and 59% believed the first year of registration should be free for non-businesses.
- 87% agreed that transfers should occur at the location where the animals and their mother are kept.

A large number of comments were made in relation to commercial dog breeding establishments, which is outside the scope of this consultation. However, the feedback has been noted and provided to the Expert Advisory Group established by the Department in July 2025, tasked with reviewing current dog breeding regulations¹ (the 2013 dog breeding regulations) and the regulation of canine fertility clinics with a view to producing a report with recommendations in 2026. A summary of the comments made is provided at the end of the document along with feedback in relation to enforceability and implementation of the policy proposals.

1. [The Welfare of Animals \(Dog Breeding Establishments and Miscellaneous Amendments\) Regulations \(Northern Ireland\) 2013](#)

Chapter 4: Responses to Individual Questions



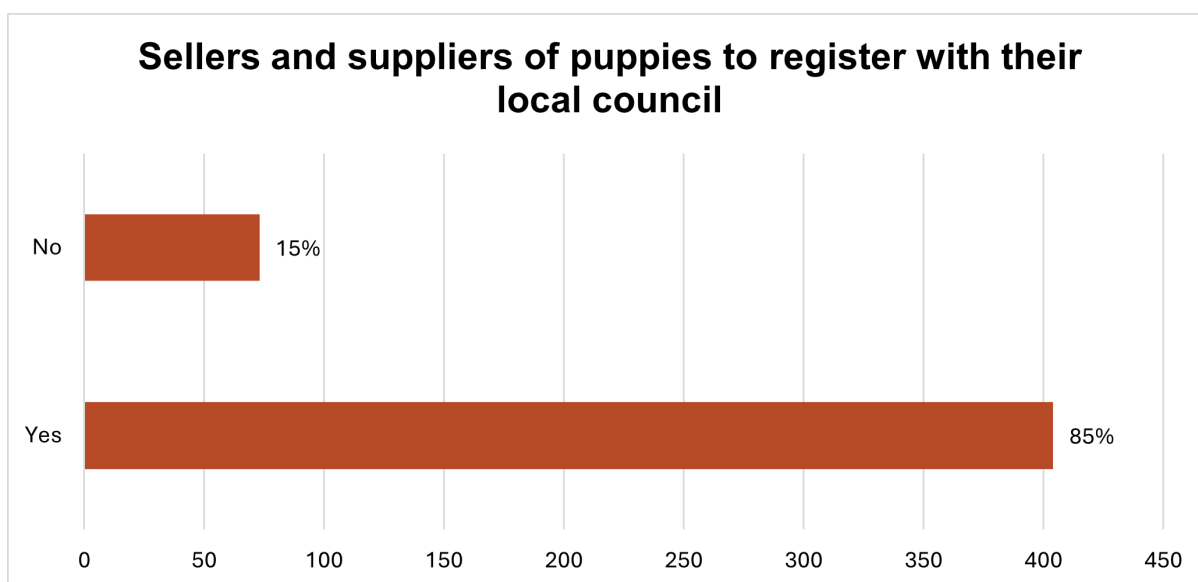
Chapter 4: Responses to Individual Questions

Respondents to the consultation were asked to consider eight main questions relating to specific proposals regarding the introduction of new rules for selling and supplying puppies and kittens.

A summary of the responses received is provided below.

Registration requirement for puppies

Q1. Do you agree that any person who wishes to sell, give away, or otherwise transfer the ownership of puppies should be required to register with their local council?



There were 478 responses to this question, of which 85% agreed.

Organisations in support included Dogs Trust, Northern Ireland Companion Animal Welfare Group (NICAWG) and Naturewatch Foundation. Comments noted that registration is a step towards improving traceability, welfare standards and accountability in the puppy trade; and requiring everyone (whether commercial, hobbyists or private sellers) to register helps to close loopholes and ensures buyers can make safe, informed choices. Veterinary Associations (British Veterinary Association (BVA), North of Ireland Veterinary Association (NIVA), and British Small Animal Veterinary Association (BSAVA)) also noted that registration supports enforcement and promotes responsible breeding and ownership practices.

Pets4Homes recommended a simple, fast, low-cost online registration system with instant approval and registration numbers, this was echoed by a number of other respondents.

Naturewatch Foundation, Pets Advertising Advisory Group (PAAG), NICA WG and the Ulster Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (USPCA) all suggested a centralised system with multi factor identification. Four Paws UK recommended verified registration. One individual suggested all pregnancies should be registered with the council.

Naturewatch Foundation suggested a standardised registration process across all councils, a live and up-to-date register which includes a function to report concerns, and a trigger system to alert councils of potential abuses (such as multiple entries). It further suggested that registrants should be required to inform councils of the number of puppies/kittens sold, given away or transferred at the end of a registration period/renewal.

One organisation, who requested anonymity, warned of block licence abuse, where they contend that this type of licence is used as a means of breeding litters of puppies without local authorities being able to prove that the person is in fact operating as a business (a block licence is a single licence which covers multiple dogs kept at the same premises). It was concerned that this would undermine the heavily regulated licensed dog breeders and called for strong identity verification to prevent exploitation of the proposed registration system.

The Kennel Club noted that after similar regulations were introduced in England in 2018, it saw a ten percent decrease in registrations (equivalent to 25,000 puppies) which it attributed to responsible breeders withdrawing from commercial breeding. It therefore cautioned that the proposals could increase demand for low welfare breeders, leading to long term issues for pets and owners. Another organisation echoed concerns that responsible breeders may be negatively impacted while unethical sellers continue profiting. Countryside Alliance Ireland noted that, whilst it recognised it would not be feasible to inspect every registered establishment, without the requirement for inspection, it was not convinced that the proposal will improve welfare.

Some respondents who were unsupportive of the proposed registration requirements for puppies considered the proposal to be overly burdensome, unnecessary or unenforceable. Others expressed the belief that these proposals should primarily focus on commercial breeders, and suggestions were made that anyone with six or less puppies, or only one or two litters annually should not be required to register. A few respondents raised concerns about non-compliance from unscrupulous breeders, for example, one individual stressed that resources would be better spent on shutting down and punishing criminals, believing that those who operate in the shadows will continue to do so, and that simply adding names to a register will have little effect given people will still buy and sell pets via the plethora of online platforms.

Thirty-eight individuals believed Northern Ireland already has several pieces of legislation about licensing dogs and breeders and that a registration of puppies with the Council is duplication. Alternative suggestions included: a focus on enforcement, public awareness, and buyer education noting that the NI Direct website has a wealth of information available for potential



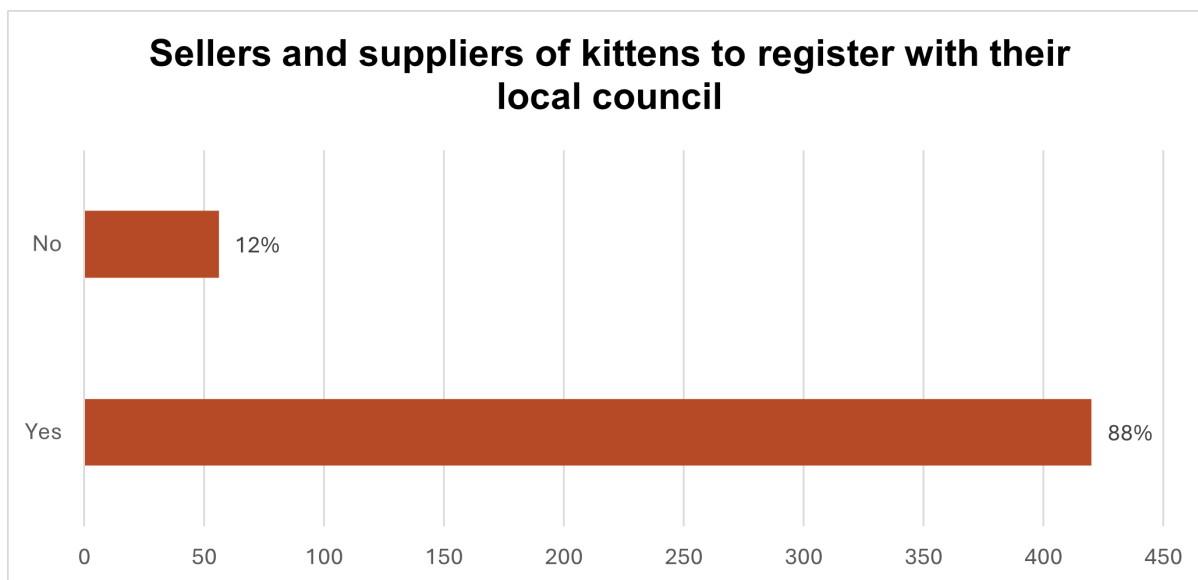
buyers on what to consider and look out for when buying a puppy.

Council Feedback

Two councils (Mid & East Antrim Borough Council, and Mid Ulster District Council) supported the requirement for individuals wishing to sell or supply puppies to register with their local council and the remaining five councils (Fermanagh & Omagh District Council, Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council, Belfast City Council, Armagh City Banbridge & Craigavon Borough Council, and Causeway Coast & Glens Borough Council) disagreed. Mid & East Antrim Borough Council, as well as the five councils who disagreed, suggested considering alternative organisations, such as the Department, the USPCA, or other animal welfare charities, managing this responsibility. Mid Ulster District Council noted that, without significant additional funding, councils may lack sufficient staffing and infrastructure to implement or enforce these proposals effectively.

Registration requirement for kittens

Q2. Do you agree that any person who wishes to sell, give away, or otherwise transfer the ownership of kittens should be required to register with their local council?



There were 477 responses to this question, of which 88% agreed.

Respondents in agreement believed this proposal could safeguard animal welfare and enhance accountability and transparency in the cat market. For example, PetProov suggested this will deter anonymous or irresponsible kitten sales and help councils build a complete picture of animal movement and welfare risks. PetProov further emphasised that this requirement must apply consistently across species, as limiting regulation to one species, such as puppies, creates a displacement effect, where unethical practices simply shift to the unregulated, such as kittens.

Seven respondents supported registration, but expressed concerns about tracking feral cats, especially in rural areas, and called for clarification on how stray and feral kittens fit into proposals. Cats Protection recommended the registration process should allow declaration of whether the kitten for sale or transfer was found as a stray or feral. Others expressed fears of increased abandonment, destruction, and fraudulent practices to avoid registration, with calls for stiff fines and stringent punishments for breaches.

Animal Welfare Organisations, including PAAG, NICAWG, USPCA, the Association of Dogs and Cats Homes (ADCH), Cats Protection, Causeway Coast Dog Rescue (CCDR) and Battersea Dogs & Cats Home called for regulation of cat breeding. CCDR also called for cat microchipping, recommending that the proposal is delivered in a phased approach.

Two respondents called for exemptions for one-off breeders, and only requiring registration for regular breeders or those with multiple queens.

Ten respondents called for a licensing system for cats. Countryside Alliance Ireland expressed the opinion that registration of kitten sellers and suppliers would be hard to keep track of and would be further complicated by the fact that there is no requirement to microchip kittens, nor is there a cat licence. Another organisation echoed these concerns.

A few respondents proposed applying registration to all cats and kittens, while another recommended limiting it to animals under one year.

Seven respondents, including the Institute of Licensing (IoL), opposed requiring registration for those giving away kittens for free, citing concerns that this could criminalise well-meaning individuals. Pets4Homes stated that their data strongly indicates that welfare concerns are significantly less common in kitten sales compared to puppy sales and questioned whether the benefits justify the costs.

Concerns were raised by some who opposed the proposals about regulating feral cats, with some fearing the proposals could lead to harmful outcomes, such as the killing of unwanted kittens. The Ulster Farmer's Union (UFU) highlighted similar concerns about farm kittens, often used for pest control, and suggested an exemption for these cases to prevent harm.

Three respondents who opposed the proposals warned that the registration system could drive unlawful breeders underground, worsen animal welfare, and would not address poor breeding practices. They recommended focusing on breeding standards and health testing instead.

Others who opposed the proposals felt that other issues should take precedence, including regulating breeding establishments, mandatory microchipping, and neutering. The Institute of Licensing (IoL) emphasised that it would be difficult to enforce the proposals in respect of cats, noting that cats' roaming behaviour and the absence of mandatory microchipping make proving ownership difficult. It also recommended introducing mandatory cat microchipping before or alongside registration requirements.

One respondent supported registration for transparency and identifying irresponsible breeding but suggested reasonable thresholds or exemptions to avoid burdening non-commercial or occasional rehoming.

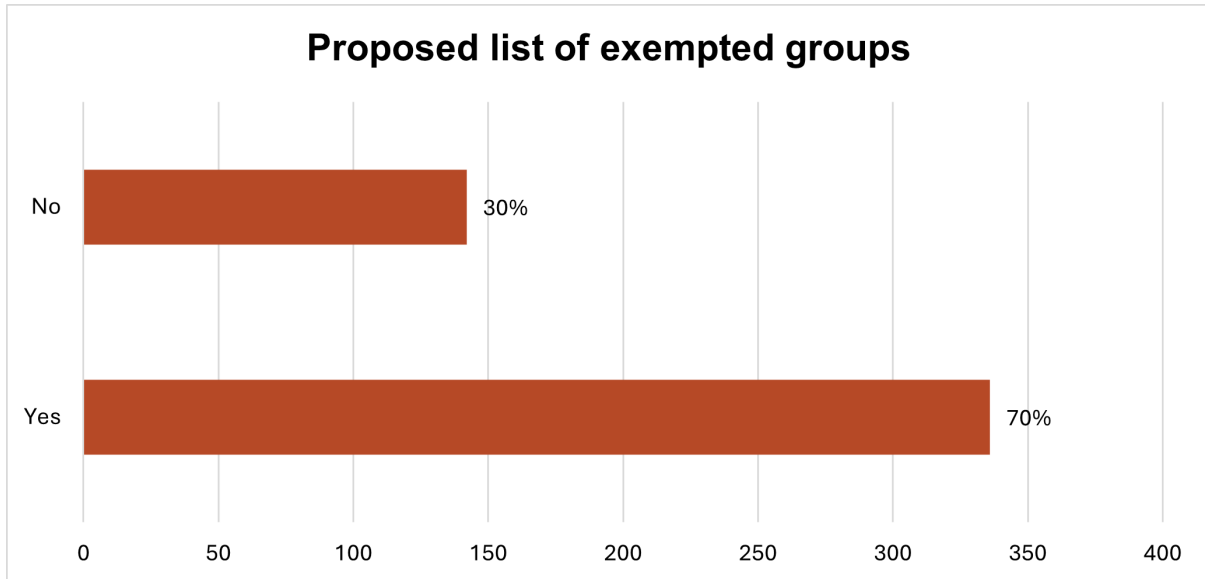


Council Feedback

All seven councils that responded were opposed to the proposals regarding registration with councils as sellers and suppliers of kittens, citing enforcement limitations (due to the free-roaming nature of cats), and expressed the opinion that proposals involving kittens should be coordinated by animal welfare charities such as Cats Protection that are already experienced in delivering effective microchipping and 'Trap, Neuter, Return' (TNR) programmes.

Exemptions

Q3. Do you agree with the proposed list of exempted groups who will be exempt from the proposed new rules?



There were 479 responses to this question, of which 70% agreed with the proposed list of groups who will be exempt from the proposed new rules. This includes:

- registered rescue and rehoming charities;
- council-operated dog pounds; and
- anyone giving puppies or kittens to rescue and rehoming charities.

Responses in favour of the proposed list of exempted groups cited the following reasons:

- Registered rescue and rehoming organisations, and council-operated dog pounds operate with welfare and not profit as their core mission (PetProov and PetProov Ltd).
- The proposed registration system targets commercial and private sales without hindering rescue operations (Pets4Homes).
- There are legitimate circumstances where keeping a dog is not in the best interests of the animal or the owner; therefore, the process of relinquishment should be as supportive as possible for buyers who have changed their mind, to prevent animals from being abandoned or neglected (Dogs Trust, NICA WG and USPCA).

Several respondents supported the proposed exemption for rescue and rehoming organisations that are formally registered with the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland (CCNI). Multiple organisations, including 'BVA, BSAVA and NIVA', Dogs Trust, Naturewatch Foundation, NICA WG, USPCA, ADCH, 'School of Law, University of Liverpool', and Cats Protection, questioned the efficacy of registration with the CCNI, noting that charitable status does not provide sufficient assurance that animal welfare standards are being met. (It should be noted that welfare standards are enshrined in the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 and enforcing breaches of those standards are a matter for the three designated enforcement bodies, rather than CCNI). Due to fears over potential exploitation of these exemptions, these organisations and some individuals called for regulation of rescue and rehoming organisations.

Concerns were raised about the proposed exemption for council-operated dog pounds, citing inconsistent standards and the sale of unclaimed dogs (Dogs Trust, NICA WG, USPCA, Naturewatch Foundation, CCDR and 'School of Law, University of Liverpool').

Four respondents raised concerns about the proposed exemption for giving away an animal to a rescue and rehoming charity, such as breeders misusing this exemption to offload excess animals. BVA, BSAVA and NIVA considered that any exemption from registration undermines the traceability of animals and recommend that in this scenario it should be the owner's responsibility to inform the Council that they have relinquished the pet and to whom. The School of Law, University of Liverpool suggested that this exemption should be kept under review, since it is undesirable and antithetical to the welfare of puppies or kittens to be passed around multiple homes in these formative months.

A small number of respondents, including Cats Protection, sought clarification on how the new proposals will affect anyone wishing to take in feral or stray kittens, with one suggesting that 'Trap, Neuter and Release' groups should also be exempt. Others proposed the exemptions are extended to registered pedigree breeders, fosterers and one-time resellers rehoming due to genuine circumstances.

Thirty-five respondents, including Walk-ees and Rhodesian Ridgeback Club, disagreed with the proposed exempted groups on the basis that no groups should be exempt from the proposed new rules. Concerns were raised about potential loopholes, such as whether a commercial breeder could pose under the banner of a charity. (It should be noted that the conferring of charitable status on an organisation is subject to an application process, overseen by CCNI, where there is an onus on the applicant to demonstrate their exclusively charitable purposes).

One organisation was less convinced that a blanket exemption for all rescue and rehoming centres is warranted, expressing concerns that having to register with the CCNI could be another bureaucratic hurdle for smaller rescues to cross and many may decide to just close their doors instead.

Four Paws UK stressed the importance of full traceability throughout a dog's life, noting that around 20% of the UKs estimated 100,000 dogs given up for adoption annually are later abandoned or returned to rehoming centres. They stated that being able to trace an animal back to a charity or council facility will establish exactly who "adopted" them, what (if any) behavioural issues they have or pre-existing health conditions as well as who was responsible for the animal. One respondent was of the belief that all details of ownership transfer should be logged, particularly if breeders or puppy farmers are relinquishing animals to rescues.

The Kennel Club called for an assessment of the capacity of rescues to absorb a potential significant uplift in puppy and kitten relinquishments and asked for consideration of what financial support can be offered to rescue and rehoming centres, to help them with the increase in costs which they assert this policy will create.

Several respondents believed further exemptions should be permitted:

- **Initial purchasers rehoming pets privately** (17, including the Kennel Club). Several individuals called for the registration system to allow for controlled resale when the owner's personal circumstances change, such as a council-issued resale certificate, capped at the original purchase price.
- **Groups covered by the existing dog licensing exemptions.** Some (18) individuals called for exemptions such as assistance dogs used by disabled persons, police dogs, or dogs kept under a block licence at the licensed premises.
- **Specialist breeders registered with recognised clubs or societies** (25). This includes purpose-bred animals, such as working, service, sporting, racing, or show dogs.
- Countryside Alliance Ireland recommended an exemption for **charities involved in training assistance dogs** to reflect legislation in England where the definition of breeding dogs excludes "breeding only assistance dogs or dogs intended to be used as assistance dogs within the meaning of section 173 of the Equality Act 2010". They further suggested it should be possible to give puppies to a charity that trains assistance dogs.
- The Irish Greyhound Studbook (IGSB) called for either a full exemption, or tailored provisions, for **thoroughbred greyhounds**.

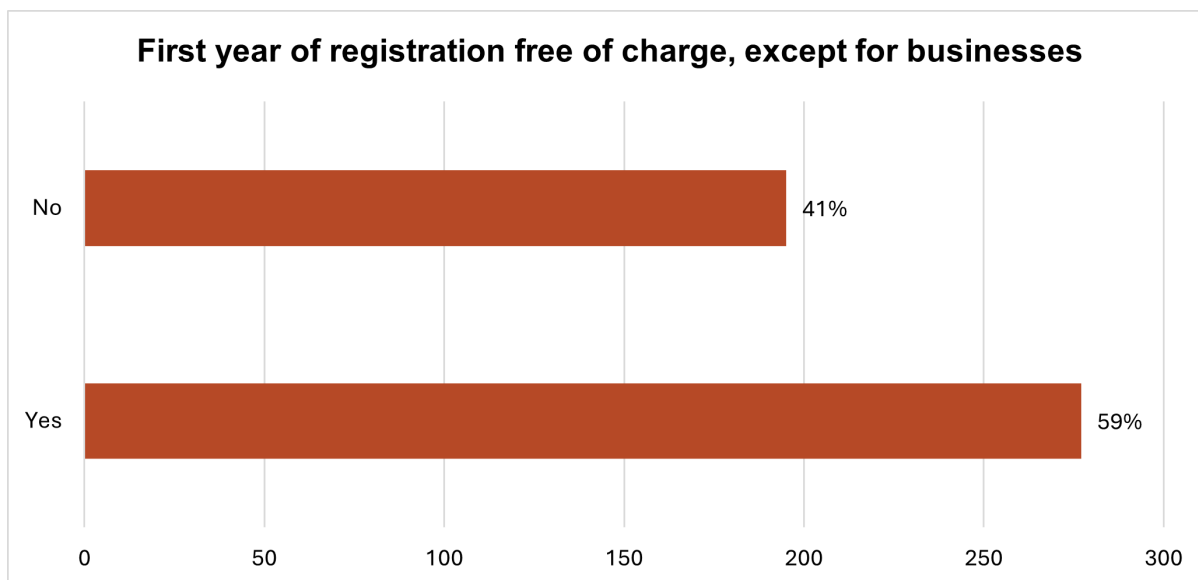
Other suggestions included exemptions for occasional transfers between family or friends, private breeders, and a single litter from a family pet. One organisation advised that veterinary practices often take in stray animals, young and old, when rescue centres lack capacity, providing them a temporary home whilst seeking a permanent home. This organisation recommended that an exemption is made for veterinary practices, noting that the vets are not the breeders of these animals, and the only other option would be to euthanise perfectly healthy animals.

Council Feedback

Three councils (Mid & East Antrim Borough Council, Mid Ulster District Council, and Causeway Coast & Glens Borough Council) supported the inclusion of exemptions but emphasised the need for these to be clearly defined and tightly managed. The remaining four councils (Fermanagh & Omagh District Council, Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council, Belfast City Council, and Armagh City Banbridge & Craigavon Borough Council) answered 'No' to this question, however advised that they agreed in principle that certain groups may be exempt from the proposed registration requirements with the following considerations; the exemption for rescue and rehoming organisations should apply solely to those who are registered with the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland, and the exemption for council-operated dog pounds should not include contractors who are employed to provide kennelling services on behalf of Councils. The three councils that agreed with the proposal also called for the considerations outlined above.

Registration fee

Q4. Do you agree that the first year of registration should be free of charge, except for businesses?



There were 473 responses to this question, of which 59% agreed that the first year of registration should be free of charge, except for businesses. Some thought that this would encourage more people to sign up initially, whereas fees could act as a barrier to registration.

A couple of respondents, whilst in agreement, emphasised that fees are essential to fund the system, and seven respondents stressed that any fees should remain minimal and proportionate. Some highlighted that the existing dog licensing and breeding regulations in Northern Ireland already provides an effective framework for the registration of puppies and therefore considered that additional registration with the council is unnecessary.

Six respondents raised concerns that high fees could lead to animals being abandoned or harmed. Some, including Cats Protection and Foxys Inn Animal Sanctuary considered free first-year registration could help prevent repeat pregnancies by allowing owners the opportunity to neuter their pets. Conversely, a couple suggested that the inclusion of fees could discourage breeding and promote neutering. One individual suggested that a more cost-effective approach is supporting widespread neutering/spaying of most animals.

Several respondents highlighted the financial impact on legitimate breeders. For example, Countryside Alliance Ireland opposed breeding establishments having to pay to be both licensed as a breeder and registered as a seller, and another respondent worried that the fee would have an impact on the ability of legitimate breeders to provide the best care and standards for their brood bitches.



There were a couple of alternative suggestions for where fees should apply, for example, one suggestion was that the first year should only be free if the application has been made before the litter is born, and another suggestion was that if another pet (or the same pet) in the household falls pregnant within the 12-month period they should be charged the fee. A few proposed restricting registration to businesses or breeders producing more than three litters annually, in line with other UK jurisdictions.

A significant number of respondents (70) that opposed the waiving of a fee for non-businesses, for the first year, including Cavaliers in Need, McBuddies Pet Care and North Coast Cat Rescue, stated that fees should apply to everyone immediately, or that fees should apply to profit-makers. Naturewatch Foundation and CCDR expressed concerns that the current 52 licensed dog breeding establishments alone could not sustain the operation of the registration system if the fees are only to be charged to licensed operators in the first year. The Institute of Licensing (IoL) held similar concerns and suggested that a balanced fee could contribute to funding the new registration system. A couple of individuals also emphasised that fees would support the registration system, i.e. to facilitate monitoring and assist with fraud prevention.

Fifteen respondents believed the inclusion of a fee could act as a deterrent to breeding, while five noted concerns that waiving the fee undermines the seriousness of registration.

Four respondents suggested that fees only apply to commercial businesses or breeders of multiple litters; a small number of respondents (including Pets4Homes) opposed fees altogether and advocated waiving the fees for everyone.

Four Paws UK cautioned that a free first-year could incentivise overbreeding and subsequent suffering and abandonment to ensure profitability before the deadline, and therefore, recommended a lead-in period.

Multiple organisations (PetProov, PetProov Ltd, Naturewatch Foundation, CCDR, Institute of Licensing and School of Law, University of Liverpool) favoured proportionate or tiered registration fees, for example, a sliding scale of fees based on the number of pets/litters or the annual turnover of the business.

Six animal welfare organisations (Dogs Trust, PAAG, NICAAG, USPCA, ADCH, and Battersea) were undecided on this proposal or did not confirm a clear response in favour of or against. These organisations recognised the merits of this proposal to incentivise people to register, and encourage owners to neuter their pet, but highlighted potential loopholes, such as someone repeatedly registering new litters each year under the guise of being a first-time breeder. Battersea and PAAG advocated for the system to allow for a free first litter rather than first year, while the remaining four called for a proportionate fee to be applied for the first litter, as opposed to the first year.



Dogs Trust, PAAG, NICAAG, and USPCA suggested linking both the premises and the individual to prevent multiple registrations at one address, and all six emphasised that guidance is needed to ensure consistent fee-setting.

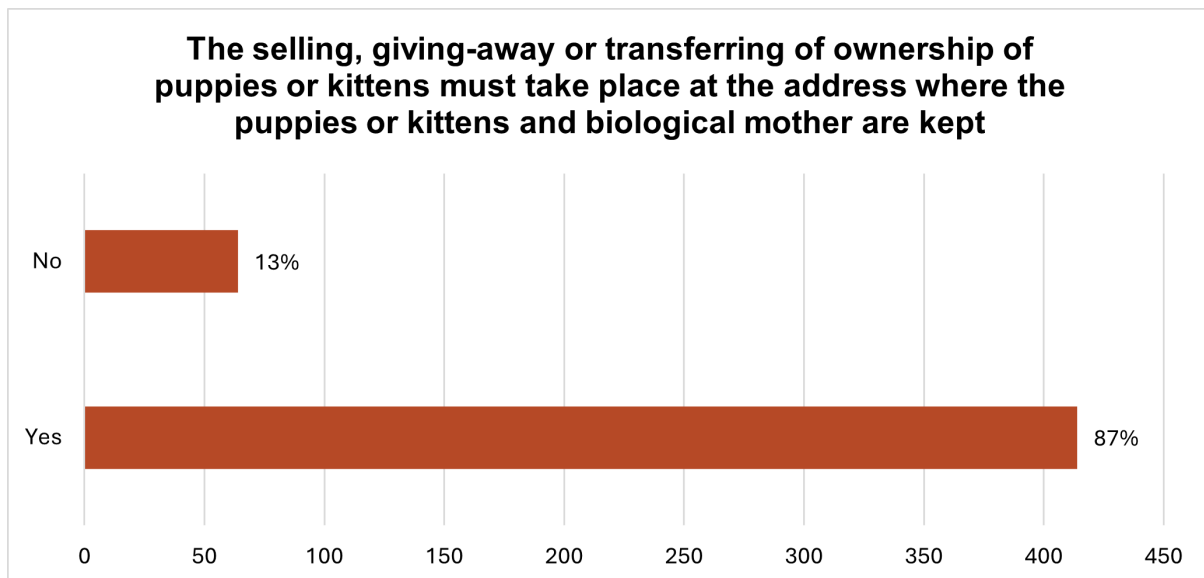
Council Feedback

All seven councils expressed the opinion that waiving fees in the first year would place a considerable burden on local councils at a time when resources are already overstretched. They noted the implementation and ongoing management of the proposed scheme will require substantial investment in staff, training, IT systems, equipment, inspections and legal enforcement. Councils contended that the costs to councils have been under-estimated and urged the Department to provide a detailed financial analysis to fully assess the volume of registrations and the associated costs. They expressed the opinion that the fee must be set at a realistic level that ensures full cost recovery (including communications, administrative and enforcement staffing, IT infrastructure, transportation and equipment, as well as long-term service delivery).

All seven councils recommended that registration fees be embedded in legislation and linked to inflation to ensure consistency across councils and sustainability over time and also called for a sliding scale of fees to reflect the number of animals being sold or transferred. Four councils stated that this fee-setting must be balanced, as where costs are too prohibitive, activity could be driven underground. These four councils expressed the opinion that the Department must bear any shortfall in full-cost recovery.

Location of sale or supply

Q5. Do you agree that a person who sells, gives away, or otherwise transfers the ownership of puppies and kittens, should be required to do so at the address where the puppies and kittens, and the biological mother are kept?



There were 479 responses to this question, of which 87% agreed that any person who sells, gives away or otherwise transfers the ownership of puppies and kittens should be required to do so at the address where the puppies and kittens and biological mother are kept.

Responses in favour of requiring sales to occur at the address where the mother and offspring are kept highlighted the following benefits:

- Promotes responsible purchasing and rehoming practices by ensuring buyers see puppies or kittens with their biological mother.
- Reduces risk of abuse, neglect, and exploitation, such as animals repeatedly bred for profit in poor conditions.
- Improves accountability, transparency and traceability.
- Prevents deceptive practices like selling from neutral locations or short-term rentals, helping to identify rogue breeders and puppy mills.

Organisations in support of this proposal included 'BVA, NIVA and BSAVA', Four Paws UK, The Kennel Club, Dogs Trust, PAAG, NICA WG, USPCA, The IoL, The School of Law, University of Liverpool, ADCH and Cats Protection.

Four respondents raised concerns about the sale of puppies bred in Northern Ireland to buyers in England, and another questioned how this proposal would work for animals transported away from their mothers. Five respondents suggested that the biological father should also be seen or documented.

One respondent called for exemptions for breeders facing exceptional circumstances, such as eviction or domestic abuse. North Coast Cat Rescue emphasised that “keeping” the biological mother of kittens is not always feasible, for example, feral cats may give birth outside or are unable to be safely contained due to their temperament, and have noted guidance on this matter would be useful.

Some respondents in opposition of requiring sales to occur at the address where the mother and offspring are kept considered this requirement to be unfeasible or unnecessary. Others raised concerns about:

- The absence of the biological mother due to death or rescue scenarios.
- False claims about who the biological mother is.
- Non-compliance from prospective buyers despite awareness of best practice.

Four respondents noted that some rural breeders use urban premises to sell animals and suggested either that licensed breeders or petshops should be allowed to deliver animals, especially for elderly or disabled buyers, or that more flexible sales locations should be permitted for purchasers.

Thirty-three respondents suggested exemptions may be needed for:

- Where puppies need alternative care, such as fostering or hand-rearing if the mother can't nurse.
- Where the breeder may face unforeseen issues like illness, and therefore, relocating may be necessary to ensure appropriate care is given.
- Large breed dogs, who need more space and opportunities for development by four months, particularly working, service, or sporting breeds.
- Breeders with separate kennels or a block licence where the registered kennels are located at a different address from the breeder's home address.

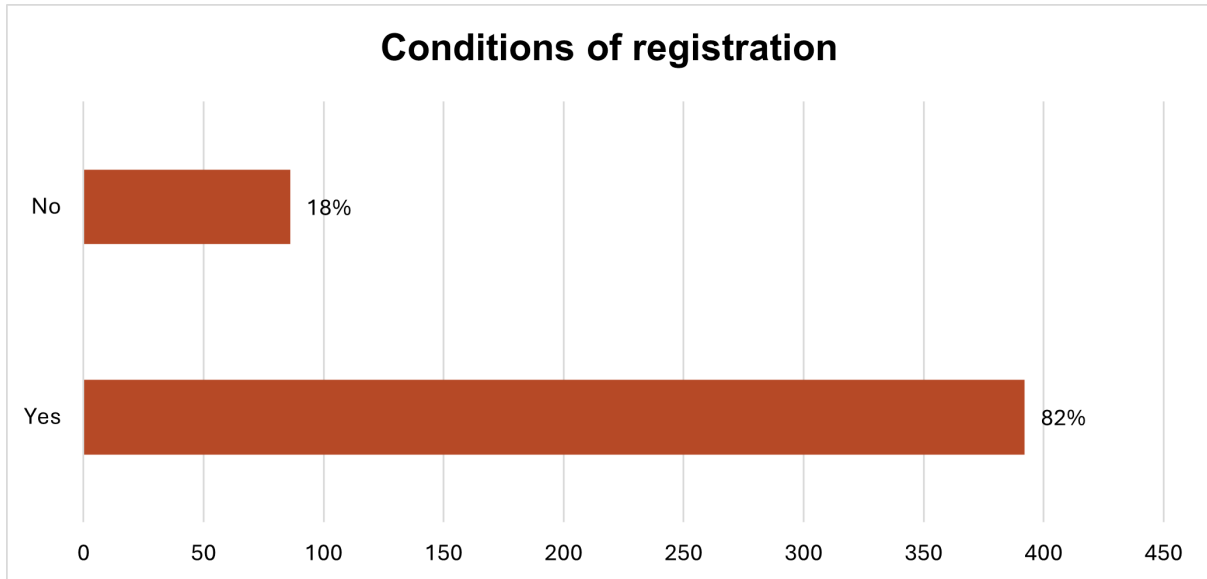


Council Feedback

All seven councils supported this requirement, however emphasised that any such requirement needed appropriate safeguards in place to prevent individuals from presenting a different animal that is not actually the biological mother of the offspring.

Conditions of registration

Q6. Do you agree with the conditions of registration, as listed in the consultation document?



There were 478 responses to this question, of which 82% agreed that any registered person must meet the following conditions:

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

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

Respondents in favour of the proposed conditions noted that these conditions could improve animal welfare, enhance traceability, and ensure accountability from both sellers and new owners.

Despite overall support, some respondents raised concerns about enforcement challenges, verifying the biological mother, handling sales made outside Northern Ireland, and managing the use of multiple addresses or changes of address from one council area to other (i.e. will the licence be re-issued or transferred?).

Multiple animal welfare organisations (Dogs Trust, PAAG, NICA WG, USPCA, Cats Protection and Battersea) recommended including breed type and the mother's microchip number in the register to be kept by the registered seller/supplier. NICA WG and USPCA also suggested that the father's microchip number should be included. However, one respondent highlighted that such record-keeping requirements may be impractical for the ordinary person.

Dogs Trust, NICA WG, USPCA, PAAG and a couple of individual respondents suggested that animals undergoing medical treatment should not be barred from sale, especially in cases like short-term antibiotic use, provided that full disclosure of medical history is provided to the new owner. Cats Protection agreed, adding that documented consent should be kept by the registered person. Veterinary associations expressed concerns that this provision could discourage veterinary care and potentially harm welfare, if disclosure is mandatory. One respondent questioned how this condition would be properly regulated, noting breeders could misrepresent treatment. The School of Law, University of Liverpool proposed allowing the sale



of puppies/kittens under six months with chronic conditions, provided veterinary records are supplied.

North Coast Cat Rescue requested an exemption for stray kittens where the mother is unknown or deceased and suggested early weaning may be necessary in such cases, while still recommending no rehoming before eight weeks. Dogs Trust, NICA WG, USPCA, and PAAG supported the exemption for showing puppies/kittens without their biological mother if she has died but advised requiring veterinary evidence (e.g. euthanasia or cremation records). This position was echoed by seven other respondents. The School of Law, University of Liverpool recommended a public awareness campaign to encourage consumers to contact councils if they are informed by a seller that a breeding bitch has died and so cannot be seen alongside her pup(s) and further supported criminal penalties for failure to register deaths or any fraudulent misrepresentations to prospective owners.

BVA, NIVA, and BSAVA recommended exempting puppies or kittens from being shown with their mother if staying together risks their health, with veterinary certification required to confirm early removal is in the animals' best interest.

Three respondents recommended registering all births, noting how often the mother has produced a litter. Several organisations, including Countryside Alliance Ireland, NICA WG, USPCA, The IoL, and Cats Protection, urged the Department to create accessible resources for breeders to share with new owners, to ensure consistent information on caring for puppies and kittens is provided.

North Coast Cat Rescue highlighted that kittens could become pregnant from four months old, including with siblings or parents, and recommended including this information in the record-keeping requirements. They also suggested providing visual indicators to help the public identify animals too young for rehoming (e.g. eye colour).

Dogs Trust, NICA WG, and USPCA noted that puppies should receive their first vaccinations around six weeks, and since they should not be sold before eight weeks, recommended that vaccination details should also be provided to new owners. PAAG and Battersea also supported including vaccination information, with Dogs Trust, NICA WG, USPCA, and PAAG recommending the vaccine brand and batch number is included to ensure compatibility and traceability in case of recalls.

Additional suggestions included requiring owners who wish to rehome their new pet to return the animal to its breeder. Many respondents recommended further measures, such as:

- Registering all puppies sold or given away with updated owner details.
- Issuing reminders for spaying/neutering and licensing.
- Providing documentation about the father.
- Requiring ID and proof of address checks for both parties.
- Recording and certifying the disposal of animals that die in their care, including those with birth defects.
- Introducing a compliance checklist for potential buyers.
- Disclosing health information, including parental details.
- Defining standards for what qualifies as a 'home address' to prevent breeding in unsuitable conditions, such as in filthy sheds.

The School of Law, University of Liverpool advised that puppies and kittens should not be separated from their mother before eight weeks, recommending ten weeks for better socialisation. PAAG supported restrictions on selling animals not bred at the registered address but asked for clarification of the term "breed," noting it could refer to mating, whelping, or caesarean at a vet surgery.

Respondents who opposed the proposed conditions, cited concerns that they were overly burdensome, bureaucratic or difficult to comply with. Key issues raised included:

- Potential exploitation of the exemption where the biological mother has died.
- False claims regarding the identity of the biological mother.
- Risks of data protection breaches.
- Enforcement challenges and lack of inspection requirements.

Pets4Homes considered the record-keeping requirements to be excessive for occasional breeders. Naturewatch Foundation recommended including the breed/type, parent details, microchip numbers, and licence numbers for dogs. The Kennel Club suggested limiting records to species sold under the registration number, questioned the relevance of details for older animals, and requested clarity on retention periods (i.e. only during the registration period or beyond). They also emphasised that it is disproportionate to require retrospective veterinary records for all animals.

The Kennel Club warned that requiring microchipping before advertising could lead to premature chipping or reduce the time for proper buyer screening, and therefore, recommended registration is allowed before microchip details are supplied. CCDR emphasised that the breeder's name must be recorded on the microchip before sale to ensure traceability and prevent third-party selling.

Twenty-eight respondents disagreed with, or questioned, the restriction of sale for animals undergoing medical treatment, with twenty-one recommending that a veterinary certificate should be issued to confirm the successful completion of treatment, and that the animal is fit for transfer to a new owner.

Two individuals and one organisation, who requested anonymity, argued that licensed petshops should not be expected to house adult dogs in order to comply with the third-party sales element of the proposal. A couple of respondents called for an exemption for those privately rehoming animals.

Concerns were also raised about the proposed exemption for a change of address. One respondent opposed this exemption over fears that breeders will use multiple addresses, including temporary rental homes, to sell puppies. Naturewatch Foundation called for clarity on how address changes will be handled, and suggested sellers should get approval before selling from a new address. The Kennel Club supported the proposed exemption for a change in address for genuine circumstances (e.g. eviction or caring responsibilities) but stressed that the 'registered address' should relate to the address where the biological mother usually resides (as per the dog licence), not necessarily where mating or whelping occurred.

Additional suggestions included using temperament testing to match puppies with suitable owners, and providing breed-specific information, including traits and common health issues. Naturewatch Foundation recommended requiring registrants to ensure puppies and kittens receive a veterinary health check before sale, and for sellers to provide microchip records, vaccination history, veterinary records, parental details, and proof of purchase.

CCDR suggested adding conditions which would ensure appropriate socialisation and enrichment until sale. The Kennel Club supported the creation of materials with information on caring for a puppy or kitten that sellers can use directly or personalise for each animal.



Council Feedback

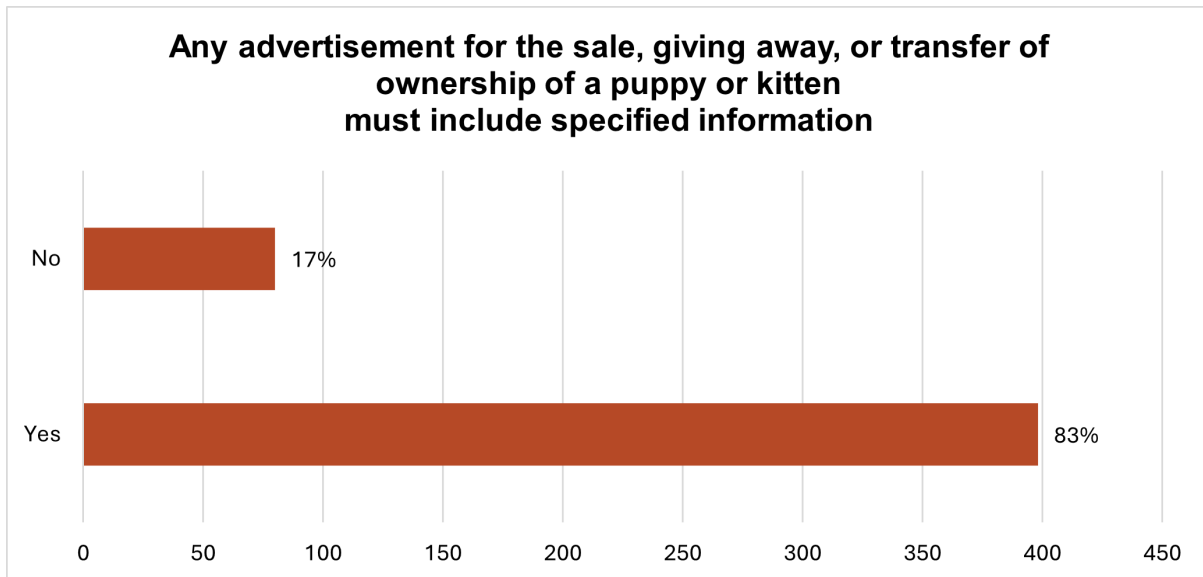
All seven councils agreed with the proposed conditions in principle. All councils recommended that the Department provides templates with the specified information on caring for a puppy or kitten, and with information on dog licensing requirements. In respect of the requirement for registered persons to keep and maintain a register for all dogs and cats on the premises, councils suggested that the word 'register' should be changed to 'record', as in many cases it may apply to a single litter.

All seven councils support the introduction of a cap on the number of puppies or kittens that may be sold, transferred, or given away within a 12-month period.

Councils raised concerns that the implementation of these conditions will create significant operational demands for councils, particularly around inspections to verify compliance. Councils also indicated that a public awareness campaign should form part of the implementation plan to ensure there is an understanding of the new responsibilities among breeders, sellers, and the general public.

Advertising requirements

Q7. Do you agree that any advertisement for the sale of, giving away of, or other transfer of ownership of a puppy or kitten must include the information, as listed in the consultation document?



There were 479 responses to this question, of which 83% agreed that any advertisement for the sale, giving away, or otherwise transfer of ownership of a puppy or kitten must:

- Include the registration number.
- Specify the council that entered the person into the Register.
- Include a recognisable photograph of the puppy or kitten being advertised.
- Display the age of the puppy or kitten being advertised.
- State the puppy or kitten being sold, given away, or otherwise transferred to a new owner was born and is resident in Northern Ireland.
- Contain a warning about the life-changing decision that buying / getting a new puppy or kitten is.

Organisations supporting the proposed advertising requirements believe they will enhance transparency, accountability, and buyer awareness, while reducing irresponsible or fraudulent pet sales. However, Countryside Alliance Ireland and some individuals (2) do not believe this proposal will stop backyard breeding or unadvertised private sales.



The Rhodesian Ridgeback Club of Ireland also noted that reputable breeders rarely advertise, as they typically have waiting lists. Some respondents questioned how these requirements would be monitored or enforced. For example, one respondent was concerned that the councils may struggle to monitor online platforms without specific reports or alerts. Another questioned the verification of photos and warned that images could encourage impulsive purchases.

Several respondents (10) expressed concerns about online advertising platforms, citing challenges in monitoring and removing non-complaint ads from platforms such as Facebook and Gumtree. Some called for ads to be restricted to accredited or council-approved websites, while others opposed any form of advertising on such platforms.

North Coast Cat Rescue considered the 'warning' about acquiring pets to be vague and suggested clearer, standardised messaging as opposed to leaving it up to the individual. The IoL recommended providing prospective new owners with information around their commitment/responsibilities and called for the Department to produce a template advertisement. The School of Law, University of Liverpool, proposed including information on a pet's lifespan and the average costs associated with pet ownership.

Seven organisations advocated for PAAG's Advertising Standards to be reflected in these conditions. Respondents also recommended inclusion of details on microchipping, dog licences and the mother and father (including photos). Eight organisations, including Naturewatch Foundation and CCDR, recommended that advertisements include photos of the offspring with their mother and/or a current individual photo of the animal for sale. Seven respondents including Dogs Trust, NICA WG, USPCA, PAAG, and Battersea, recommended including breed-specific health information and the animal's sex. Battersea proposed stating the breeder type (i.e private seller, hobby breeder or licensed large-scale commercial breeder). Additional suggestions included traceable phone numbers, medical history, and estimated costs.

To strengthen implementation, PetProov Ltd recommended making the advertising requirements mandatory across all major platforms, including third-party listing sites and social media, while Universities Federation for Animal Welfare (UFAW) called for automatic verification systems to be integrated, like the VeriPet system. PetProov and Four Paws UK urged mandatory ID and address verification for sellers, with clear penalties for non-compliance or providing false information in advertisements. CCDR echoed calls for online platforms to verify the breeder's seller/supplier registration details. UFAW and veterinary associations recommended referencing the Puppy and Kitten Checklists. Cats Protection highlighted that 63% of UK cats are purchased online and recommended collaboration with online platforms to remove non-compliant ads and establish public reporting processes.

Twenty-five individuals who did not agree with the proposals about advertisements, considered the proposed conditions to be disproportionate or excessive, with some arguing that they distract from the core issue of third-party sales. Nineteen of the respondents who did not agree with the advertising proposals felt the rules should only apply to businesses, and several suggested including the mother's dog licence number in advertisements. Others noted that the proposed requirements exceed those imposed in other UK jurisdictions and do not address the issue of purchaser suitability. Several respondents (13) highlighted that guidance on responsibly buying a pet is already publicly available, for example, on NI Direct.

Concerns were raised about potential geographical restrictions, with some misunderstanding the proposal as limiting sales to NI residents and one respondent referencing a need to maintain cross-border sales to the Republic of Ireland. A couple of respondents feared this could harm breed lines.

Pets4Homes questioned the value of stating that puppies were born in Northern Ireland, as this is difficult to verify. Six respondents viewed the proposed 'warning' about the life-changing decision buying a new puppy or kitten is to be unnecessary, comparing it to cigarette warnings.

Thirteen respondents opposed mandatory photos and questioned how photo authenticity would be regulated, noting concerns that photographs may encourage impulsive purchases. A few rejected the proposed advertising requirements altogether, while Pets4Homes and an individual called for a ban to be placed on all social media advertising. Additional concerns included data protection risks, such as misuse of registration numbers, or the stigma of being unable to take care of an animal anymore leading to animal abandonment.

Four respondents suggested adding further details to advertisements, including litter birth dates, microchip numbers, breed-specific health information, and seller ID photos.

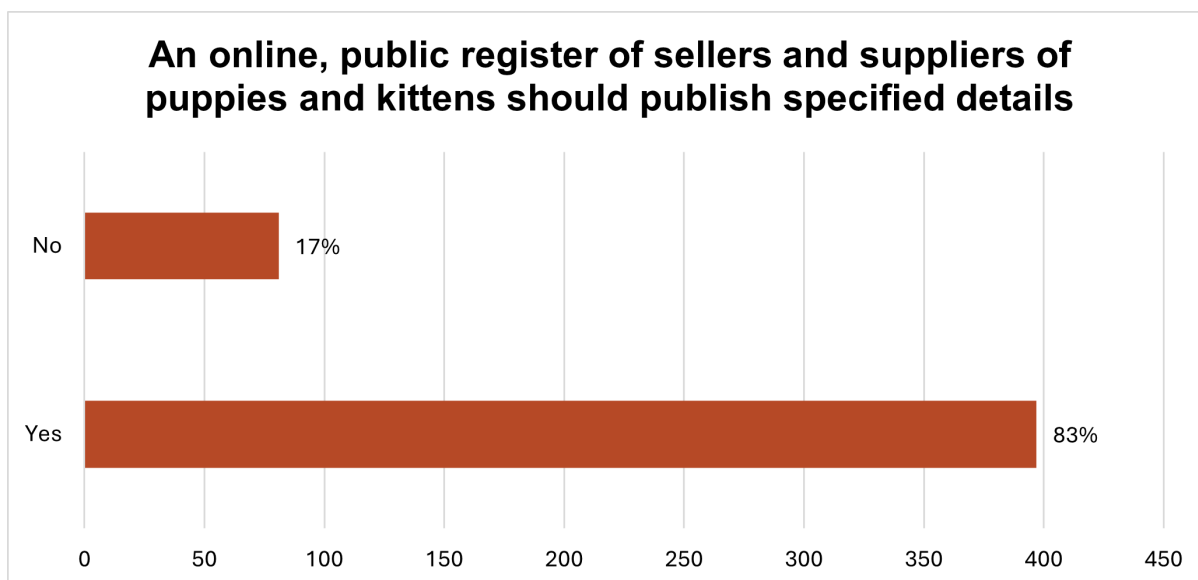
Council Feedback

All seven councils agreed that any advertisement for the sale of, giving-away of, or transfer of ownership of a puppy or kitten should include the specified information. All seven councils recommended that instead of the advertisement containing a "warning" about the life changing decision that buying/getting a new puppy or kitten is, it may be more appropriate to provide an informative notice for prospective new owners around their commitment/responsibilities.

Six councils also recommended that the Department provide a sample advertisement format to assist sellers in meeting the new requirements consistently. Two councils welcome actions to improve animal welfare, however they emphasised that they do not agree that councils should be allocated responsibility as a registration body for the sale of puppies and kittens; and it is their view that the role of the registration authority should focus on education and engagement, which is best carried out by a stakeholder/charity/third sector organisation.

Public Register

Q8. Do you agree that an online, public register of sellers and suppliers of puppies and kittens should publish the detail, as listed in the consultation document?



There were 480 responses to this question, of which 83% agreed that an online public register of sellers and suppliers of puppies and kittens should publish the following information:

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

Respondents who supported publishing specified information on an online public register of puppy and kitten sellers believe it would:

- Help prospective buyers identify reputable breeders.
- Increase transparency in transactions.
- Deter unethical breeding practices.
- Strengthen enforcement.

However, fifteen respondents raised concerns about security, theft and data protection. Organisations such as Cats Protection, Dogs Trust, PAAG, Naturewatch Foundation, and The Kennel Club recommended limiting published details to postcodes or partial addresses, particularly for hobby or accidental breeders. Veterinary bodies (BVA, NIVA, BSAVA) suggested that publishing the registration number alone would suffice.

Eight respondents proposed including information on animal-related convictions, accusations, and reasons for registration suspension or revocation. Suggestions included listing individuals banned from owning animals and tracking breeder history (e.g. dogs involved in attacks, surrendered to rescues, and health/lifespan data).

Twenty respondents, including UFAW, Battersea, Naturewatch Foundation, CCDR, Cats Protection, and ADCH suggested including one or more of the following to the register:

- Number of animals sold annually.
- Details of each animal (DOB, description).
- Litters per mother over time.
- Number of animals per address.
- Breeding age limits and veterinary certification.
- Council inspection dates and licensing authority names.
- Microchip status (without publishing the number).
- Breeder/seller details stored at microchipping stage.
- Business/trading name and associated licence number.

Four respondents called for limits on the number of breeding bitches and animals allowed for sale or supply. Additional recommendations included a register for breeders who export animals. PetProov suggested publishing only verified registrants (with ID and proof-of-address checks) and adding a “verified” status marker to build public trust.

The IoL queried whether publication would be mandatory or voluntary, i.e. would there be an option to “opt out”. Naturewatch Foundation called for statutory guidance for councils on suspensions and revocations to ensure consistency. NICAWG, USPCA, and Cats Protection recommended hosting links to each council’s Register, or creating a single point of search portal, on the Department’s website. CCDR proposed a feedback/reporting system for buyers to report non-compliance or welfare concerns.

Eleven percent of respondents raised concerns about privacy, safety and data protection. Key issues raised included:

- **Risk of pet theft**, especially of rare, expensive or pedigree breeds (33). Countryside Alliance Ireland noted that the rise in value of puppies has seen a commensurate increase in puppy thefts.
- **Fears about harassment**, for example, from anti-breeding activists (24).
- **Concerns about unsolicited callers** (5), with suggestions made to make publication optional, and include an ability to remove details later. One organisation, who requested anonymity, also noted that litters may sell quickly, making long-term public listing unnecessary, and recommended that individuals should have the choice to withhold or withdraw their details from public view.

Nineteen respondents disagreed with this proposal as they believed it would contravene requirements in other areas, namely GB. Six respondents considered the public register to be unnecessary, expensive or ineffective in addressing irresponsible pet ownership.

Seventeen of the respondents who disagreed with the proposal suggested voluntary publication instead, to allow breeders to demonstrate transparency without comprising their safety. A small number of respondents proposed limiting published details to the registration number, or name and registration number.

Thirteen respondents recommended alternative access suggestions, such as password-protected systems, council-controlled access or request-based disclosure. Pets4Homes supported council-held databases for platforms like themselves to verify information, however they opposed the publication of this information, fearing it would deter registration.

Council Feedback

All seven councils agreed with an online, public register of sellers and suppliers of puppies and kittens. Four councils indicated a preference for the establishment of a centralised registration system for Northern Ireland, similar to the scheme managed by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) in the Republic of Ireland, as opposed to the proposed Council Register of Sellers and Suppliers. The remaining three councils agreed in principle with the proposed online register but contended that such a register might mean that councils would be expected to carry out inspections to verify compliance before publication, and therefore this would have significant implications for council resources and officer time. These three councils expressed the opinion that these additional responsibilities must therefore be acknowledged and funded by the Department.

Chapter 5: Responses about Other Matters



Chapter 5: Responses about Other Matters

Enforcement and Implementation

Multiple individuals and organisations, including Dogs Trust, NICA WG, USPCA, and BVA, NIVA, and BSAVA, highlighted the necessity for sufficient resources and training for enforcement authorities. Concerns were raised that, without adequate council funding, the effectiveness of the proposed register could be compromised. As an example, ADCH drew parallels to the equine database in Britain which it contended is unsuccessful.

Several individuals and organisations provided suggestions for improving enforcement of puppy registration and sales regulations. Some advocated for enhanced council enforcement powers, such as mandatory inspection, while others favoured a centralised government body to take on enforcement. Collaboration with vets and online selling platforms, as well as public awareness campaigns, were also recommended to support enforcement. Another organisation advocated for information-sharing mechanisms to be put in place between councils and other statutory bodies such as PSNI and HMRC.

Additional suggestions included establishing reporting mechanisms, for example a hotline for reporting breaches, and implementing clear consequences for non-compliance, such as fines or prosecution.

Additional comments included the need for a streamlined registration process to avoid delays in rehoming, an enforceable code of conduct, and housing and breeding standards. Naturewatch Foundation proposed annual reporting on puppy and kitten sales and breeding, while the Kennel Club called for a full post-implementation review to assess the impact of the registration system.

Dog Breeding

Respondents shared concerns about unscrupulous breeding, licensed dog breeding establishments, and the current legislation providing for the licensing of dog breeding establishments. Some of these respondents, including Pets4Homes, Naturewatch Foundation and the School of Law (University of Liverpool), urged reform of the 2013 Dog Breeding Regulations to reflect modern welfare standards. Many respondents also recommended a cap on the number of breeding bitches allowed.



The UFU expressed concerns about advancing this consultation before the Expert Advisory Group on Dog Breeding completed its work and published its recommendations, stressing that there is a risk of creating duplication, inconsistency, or potential conflict between the differing strands of policy.

General comments

Respondents including the Dogs Trust, NICA WG, USPCA, Four Paws UK, PAAG, Battersea, The IoL, Veterinary Associations, and Naturewatch Foundation noted the need for a comprehensive communication campaign to raise awareness of the new requirements amongst the general public, breeders and sellers and to ensure the consequences of contravening the requirements are made clear.

Countryside Alliance Ireland suggested it should be illegal to buy from unregistered sellers or to sell unvaccinated, unmicrochipped animals. Battersea advocated for multi-factor identity verification and proposed that all animal-related activities fall under the scope of a new licensing framework. Additional suggestions included mandatory notification to councils for all rehoming no matter the age of the animal and requiring prospective buyers to complete a training course on how to care for a dog.

Naturewatch commented that it recognised the registration requirement will only apply to sales which occur in Northern Ireland. It noted that some businesses in NI transport puppies for sale in Great Britain which raises ethical issues and are the subject of considerable public concern. There is a risk that such practices become more attractive if viewed in a legitimate way to circumvent registration requirements.



Chapter 6: Impact Assessments



Chapter 6: Impact Assessments

Regulatory Impact Assessment

A total of 171 respondents made comments on the Regulatory Impact Assessment.

The majority of respondents (62%) referred to enforcement, costs and/or funding. Feedback included views that the Regulatory Impact Assessment does not sufficiently address: the financial costs of educating the public about the proposed new rules; the financial impact placed on owners constrained by the six-month resale restriction; the existing evidence which suggests most dogs are sourced responsibly; the lack of parity with other UK jurisdictions which implement a three-litter threshold; and the unnecessary risks to the public from publishing breeder details.

Respondents expressed concerns about council resource and called for necessary funding to be provided to support the implementation and enforcement of the registration system (e.g. staffing costs, training, IT infrastructure). Recommendations include introducing a centralised public register; producing robust guidance that would support councils to set commensurate, proportionate fees; and creating an Animal Welfare Enforcement Group for councils which is overseen or coordinated by the Department. Respondents raised concerns about enforcement challenges and lack of inspection requirements. To aid enforcement, respondents called for appropriate actions and heavy fines. Others indicated that it is unreasonable to expect local councils to enforce these requirements in the first instance, and recommended that a separate body, such as the Department, take on the enforcement responsibility. Respondents questioned how much this would cost and who would pay for it. Feedback was given regarding the registration fee, with suggestions ranging from no fees to high fees, especially for commercial breeders.

Twenty respondents were critical of puppy farms, unscrupulous breeders and/or large-scale dog breeding establishments, including the council's willingness to license such establishments. Thirteen raised concerns about the impact on rescue and rehoming organisations who are already overburdened, with some suggesting that government support should be provided. Four respondents requested clarification on the role and responsibilities of petshops. A couple of respondents noted that there are currently no licensed petshops selling puppies in Northern Ireland, so the future costs of restricting such businesses are unclear, and similarly, the impact of restricting home deliveries of puppies cannot yet be accurately assessed. There were also some concerns that the proposed requirements could negatively impact upon animal welfare, for example, if the registration process is too burdensome, or if fees are considered too expensive, it could lead to people dumping or abandoning animals.

Councils expressed the opinion that the proposals reflect a concerning and growing trend of central government devolving enforcement responsibilities to them, without a corresponding transfer of adequate resources, powers, or legal protections, and indicated that they cannot continue to absorb additional responsibilities, especially when they fall outside core remit and expertise. Councils stressed that the Regulatory Impact Assessment significantly underestimates the financial and operational burden on councils, especially regarding inspections, staffing, IT infrastructure, and enforcement. Councils are not in favour of the provision for a registration requirement for “giving away” puppies or kittens as it is believed that it may lead to criminalising individuals who are simply trying to give away their pet’s offspring to a friend or neighbour.

Rural Needs Impact Assessment

Sixty-three respondents made comments on the Rural Needs Impact Assessment. Some respondents indicated that rural breeders may face barriers to registration and compliance, such as limited internet connectivity, access to council offices or veterinary services, and transport limitations. Suggestions included offering offline registration options and tailoring campaigns to rural communities. Five respondents called for consideration of feral or farm cats (e.g. mousers) and one individual recommended an exemption for veterinary practices who often help rehome unplanned litters. Four organisations noted that the proposed regulations would help create a breeder/seller database to identify rural challenges; three of which also recommended annual returns to councils to better understand rural needs. An organisation noted that city breeding is often impractical due to space and noise, and policies should avoid disadvantaging rural breeders. Three individuals were of the view that breeding is largely rural, however pet ownership is widespread, so rural businesses must retain access to population centres. A couple of respondents called for more support for rural breeders who rely on occasional litters for income. Another individual felt the proposals restrict breeders’ ability to move animals, while another raised concerns about difficulties for buyers visiting rural locations. Two others stressed the need for accountability in rural areas, such as farms, to curb poor breeding practices.

Councils highlighted the vital role of kittens and puppies in rural life, noting that these animals offer companionship, reduce isolation, and support mental health, especially in areas where social infrastructure is limited. Councils urged further consideration of how the proposed regulations may affect rural households and small businesses involved in responsible breeding and rehoming, and emphasised the need for accessible, affordable and well-regulated services. Another organisation supported this view.



Equality and Disability Screening Exercise

Thirty-five respondents made comments on the Equality and Disability Screening Exercise. Five respondents stressed the need for improved accessibility (e.g. Easy Read formats, screen reader compatibility), multilingual support, or offline application options. An individual raised concerns about delivery access for disabled and elderly individuals, and another individual expressed concerns about the physical accessibility of premises (i.e for wheelchair users). An individual highlighted the importance of maintaining access to companion animals for vulnerable groups, noting that increased centralisation or costs could create barriers. Another individual stressed the need for concessions for low-welfare families and disabled people, noting the vital role animals play in supporting vulnerable groups. Another individual highlighted the importance of access to well-bred dogs from family homes and expressed concern that overly restrictive regulations could limit these options, potentially impacting the wellbeing of those who rely on animals for daily support.

Councils disagreed with the claim that they are responsible for enforcing the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 in relation to puppy and kitten sales, stating that they only enforce certain animal welfare provisions. Another organisation supported this view.

Chapter 7: Departmental Response and Next Steps



Chapter 7: Departmental Response and Next Steps

Departmental Response

The Department is committed to introducing enhanced protections, under the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, for puppies and kittens that are sold or supplied; and is grateful to all those who engaged with the consultation and submitted responses.

The Department will work closely with councils (who have enforcement responsibility, under the 2011 Act, for matters relating to companion animals such as puppies and kittens) and address any challenges identified. The Department will also update the impact assessments, as appropriate, taking account of comments made during the consultation.

Sellers and suppliers of puppies

The Department welcomes the support expressed by the majority of respondents for its proposal that any person who wishes to sell, give away, or otherwise transfer the ownership of puppies should be required to register with their local council. The Department acknowledges the calls for changes to be made to dog breeding legislation first but does not consider that changes to the requirements for licensed dog breeding establishments must be a priority over requirements for sellers and suppliers of puppies. The Department, therefore, intends to take forward legislation to give effect to this proposal so that a person who sells or supplies (for free) a puppy under six months of age, will be required to register with their local council. The registered seller and supplier of puppies will be required to meet conditions of registration.

Sellers and suppliers of kittens

The Department welcomes the support expressed by the majority of respondents for its proposal that any person who wishes to sell, give away, or otherwise transfer the ownership of kittens should be required to register with their local council. The Department also acknowledges the concerns expressed by respondents regarding enforceability, for example, where the mother might be a feral cat, or a roaming non-owned cat, and also notes the concerns about the proposed registration of people who give kittens away for free. In light of these concerns, the Department has reviewed its original proposal and is amending its policy position to reflect the feedback received. Accordingly, the Department intends to take forward legislation to give effect to the proposal to require registration of sellers of kittens but will not require registration of suppliers. The registered seller of kittens will be required to meet conditions of registration.

Exempted groups

Most respondents agreed with the proposed exemptions from the requirement to register with local councils, as a seller/supplier of puppies and kittens. The Department, however, notes that some respondents called for additional exemptions. After careful review, the Department has decided not to include an exemption for businesses that offer a delivery service only, in the forthcoming registration. This means that all sellers and suppliers of puppies, and all sellers of kittens, including those who deliver the animal to the new owner, will be required to register with their local council and comply with conditions of registration. In addition, the Department does not intend to include an exemption for racing greyhounds. This means that the current welfare and traceability frameworks that respondents have indicated are currently present and operational, will in the future be strengthened by the enhanced traceability that registration as a seller or supplier of puppies will bring. The Department intends to take forward legislation, which will apply to owned and kept cats only; feral cats will not be covered. This approach is intended to ensure consistency, traceability, and accountability.

Fees

A small majority of respondents agreed with the Department's proposal to make the first year of registration free of charge for non-business applicants, while businesses would be required to pay from the outset. However, many respondents, including councils, suggested that fees should apply to all applicants, including non-businesses, from the first year. Councils also contended that the costs to councils have been under-estimated, expressed that the fee must be set at a realistic level that ensures full cost recovery, and recommended that fees be embedded in legislation and that any shortfall in full-cost recovery must be borne by DAERA.

Mindful of the requirements of managing public money, the Department intends to include the proposed fee setting powers within the legislation it intends to bring forward therefore councils will be able to ensure appropriate fees are charged for full-cost recovery. There will be no requirement for councils to set the fee at zero in the first year for non-businesses and the legislation will enable councils to set fees which reflect the costs incurred by them. The Department will work closely with councils on this matter.

Biological mother

The Department welcomes the opinion expressed by the majority of respondents that a person who sells, gives away, or otherwise transfers a puppy or kitten, should do so at the address where the puppies and kittens, and the biological mother, are kept. It, therefore, intends to make this provision accordingly.

Conditions of registration

The Department welcomes the opinion expressed by the majority of respondents that a person who sells or supplies a puppy or kitten, must meet specified conditions. It also acknowledges, with thanks, the recommendations made by some respondents, regarding appropriate conditions, for example for when the biological mother has died, and for when a puppy or kitten is undergoing veterinary treatment. The Department, therefore, intends to take forward legislation to give effect to this proposal, setting out appropriate conditions for registered sellers or suppliers to adhere to.

Advertisements

The Department welcomes the opinion expressed by the majority of respondents that a person who sells, gives away, or otherwise transfers a puppy or kitten, must meet specified conditions regarding any advertisements it makes. It also acknowledges, with thanks, the recommendations made by some respondents, regarding additional requirements needed. The Department, therefore, intends to take forward legislation to give effect to this proposal, setting out appropriate conditions for advertisements that registered sellers or suppliers must adhere to.

Public Register

The Department welcomes the opinion expressed by the majority of respondents that an online, public list of sellers and suppliers of puppies and kittens should publish specified information. The Department, however, notes that some respondents were concerned about the publication of full address details, including citing potential for targeted abuse from people who oppose any type of puppy/kitten selling/supplying. The Department will undertake further consideration of what data is deemed to be proportionate and justifiable to publish, while also fulfilling policy objectives. This consideration will be undertaken in accordance with the Department's legal obligations and applicable statutory and regulatory requirements.

Next Steps

The Department will bring forward the appropriate legislation, to the Northern Ireland Assembly, as soon as is possible. It will provide a lead-in period for the legislative changes to allow sufficient time for adjustment and implementation. The Department will work with councils to agree an appropriate timeline, and ensure requirements are communicated as early as possible.

Appendix A - List of Respondents

- Armagh City Banbridge & Craigavon Borough Council
- Association of Dogs and Cats Homes (ADCH)
- Battersea Dogs & Cats Home
- Belfast City Council
- British Veterinary Association (BVA), North of Ireland Veterinary Association (NIVA), and British Small Animal Veterinary Association (BSAVA)
- Cats Protection
- Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council
- Causeway Coast Dog Rescue (CCDR)
- Cavaliers in Need
- Countryside Alliance Ireland
- Dogs Trust
- Fermanagh & Omagh District Council (FODC)
- Foxys Inn Animal Sanctuary
- Four Paws UK
- Hope Haven Dog Rescue
- Irish Greyhound Studbook (IGSB)
- Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council
- McBuddies Pet Care
- Mid and East Antrim BC (MEA)
- Mid Ulster District Council (MUDC)

- Naturewatch Foundation
- North Coast Cat Rescue
- Northern Ireland Companion Animal Welfare Group (NICAWG)
- Pet Advertising Advisory Group (PAAG)
- PetProov
- PetProov Ltd
- Pets4Homes
- Rhodesian Ridgeback Club of Ireland
- School of Law, University of Liverpool
- The Institute of Licensing (IoL)
- The Kennel Club
- The Ulster Society for the Prevention Cruelty to Animals (USPCA)
- Ulster Farmer's Union (UFU)
- UFAW (Universities Federation for Animal Welfare)
- Walk-ee's
- 5 Additional Organisations
- 447 Members of the Public



Appendix B - Breakdown of Responses to Each Question

Consultation Question	Yes	No
Do you agree that any person who wishes to sell, give away, or otherwise transfer the ownership of puppies should be required to register with their local council?	85%	15%
Do you agree that any person who wishes to sell, give away, or otherwise transfer the ownership of kittens should be required to register with their local council?	88%	12%
Do you agree with the proposed list of exempted groups who will be exempt from the proposed new rules? (If not, which groups do you believe should be exempted?)	70%	30%
Do you agree that the first year of registration should be free of charge, except for businesses?	59%	41%
Do you agree that a person who sells, gives away, or otherwise transfers the ownership of puppies and kittens, should be required to do so at the address where the puppies and kittens, and the biological mother are kept?	87%	13%
Do you agree with the conditions of registration, as listed?	82%	18%
Do you agree that any advertisement for the sale of, giving away of, or other transfer of ownership of a puppy or kitten must include the information as listed?	83%	17%
Do you agree that an online, public Register of Sellers and Suppliers of Puppies and Kittens should publish the detail, as listed?	83%	17%



Department of
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An Roinn

**Talmhaíochta, Comhshaoil
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