

Manifesto for Cats: Northern Ireland



The *Manifesto for Cats: Northern Ireland* forms part of Cats Protection's advocacy work "Speaking up for cats". Campaigning for change that will deliver a better world for cats.



Cat breeding

Promotion of neutering and updating the law to control the breeding and sale of cats to reduce the number of unwanted kittens.



Care and wellbeing

Northern Irish Government recognition of the benefits cats and other companion animals bring to health and personal wellbeing.



Microchipping

Making it compulsory to microchip owned cats.



Dangerous dogs

Full use of measures within dog legislation to minimise dog attacks on cats and promote responsible dog ownership.



Animal welfare education

Inclusion of animal welfare in the Northern Irish curriculum so that all children learn about responsible pet care.



Cats and housing providers

Northern Irish Government recognition of the needs of people with cats or other companion animals in rented housing and care homes to allow them to keep their pets.



Welfare of cats in NI

Greater investment in raising public awareness of the five welfare needs of animals and better enforcement of existing laws to improve how cases of neglect and mistreatment of cats are reported and dealt with.



Labelling toxic products

Clear labelling of flowers, plants and household products sold that are toxic to cats so owners know which to avoid.



Banning snares

An outright ban on the use of snares on the basis they are inhumane and cruel and inflict suffering, injury or death upon animals caught in them, including cats.



Illegal imports

Creation of a national database to ensure that a central record is kept of all cats entering the UK legally so those entering illegally without a rabies vaccine can be identified without delay.

Cats Protection is the UK's leading feline welfare charity. Our focus is on controlling domestic, stray and feral cat populations through neutering, providing education and information about cat welfare and rehoming cats. In Northern Ireland, over 60 volunteers run three branches which operate alongside our Belfast Adoption Centre. Our volunteers and staff work tirelessly to educate school children and adult community groups about cat welfare, to help neuter cats and to rehome over 400 unwanted and abandoned cats a year. Our vision is a world where every cat is treated with kindness and an understanding of its needs.



People care about cats

Animal welfare matters as a political issue to voters in Northern Ireland. A YouGov poll¹ asked voters to name issues that determine how they cast their vote. In Northern Ireland, 21 per cent of those surveyed named animal welfare as such an issue – the highest number anywhere in the UK and far ahead of the national average of 14 per cent.

Cats are hugely popular pets providing love, affection and companionship. The most recent survey statistics show that 13 per cent of households in Northern Ireland own one or more cats – that's an estimated 130,000 cats.²

Cats Protection has a large social media presence in Northern Ireland, with over 14,000 likes for our Northern Ireland Branch and adoption centre Facebook pages. Across the UK, Cats Protection's national Facebook page has over 370,000 likes, with thousands of people every day liking, discussing and sharing our messages.³

Cats Protection welcomes the amendment in February 2016 to the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 which will increase the maximum sentences for certain animal cruelty offences. The changes will mean the maximum sentence for Crown Court cases moves from two to five years and Magistrates' Court cases from six to 12 months. In addition, the maximum fine imposed by Magistrates' Court has increased from £5,000 to £20,000.⁴

The Northern Ireland Assembly election in 2016 presents an opportunity for politicians to "Speak up for cats".

A Manifesto for Cats

There are many actions that the Northern Irish Government and local authorities can do to ensure a better world for cats. The public is constantly in touch with Cats Protection about issues of concern, whether it is the number of feral cats breeding out of control, cases of cats being neglected or mistreated or landlords refusing to accept tenants with cats.





Breeding for sale: promotion of neutering and updating the law to control the breeding and sale of cats to reduce the number of unwanted kittens

Frances' story

Cats Protection has 18 volunteers in Northern Ireland like Frances Maginnis, who give up their own time to carry out vital Trap, Neuter and Return (TNR) work. Frances has helped with TNR projects for five years, liaising with farmers, smallholders and landowners to identify feral colonies.

Like all volunteers, she uses humane traps to capture ferals with minimal distress, arranges for them to be neutered and returns them to their outdoor homes as swiftly as possible. Neutered ferals are then able to live healthier, happier lives in smaller colonies. Frances said: "When we go into a feral colony, it's not uncommon to find very sick, young kittens and adult females which are frail and weak through overbreeding. Male cats are often battle-scarred and injured from fighting associated with unneutered cats. It's a stark reminder to us of why neutering is so important and when we return them after neutering we know they will be able to lead better lives."



"We feel like we're fighting fire all the time. We are taking in litter after litter of kittens because people just aren't having their cats neutered. If they're lucky, the kittens come into our care for rehoming, if not they end up living semi-feral on the street or are given away to people who do not have them neutered. It's a vicious circle."

– Barbara Haig, Cats Protection Downpatrick Branch¹⁰

At Cats Protection we know there are more cats and kittens than there are loving homes. In the two year period up until the end of 2014, the number of kittens from unwanted litters handed into our Belfast Adoption Centre more than tripled. Unwanted litters have also been one of the top three reasons for cats coming into the centre for the past two years.⁵

Neutering is the most effective way to reduce the number of unwanted kittens and control the domestic, stray and feral cat population. In 2014 in Northern Ireland, Cats Protection neutered over 600 cats that came into our care, subsidised the cost of neutering for over 8,300 pet cats, and neutered over 3,620 feral cats.

But there is still so much to be done. Only 88 per cent of owned cats are neutered in Northern Ireland, leaving 20,000 unneutered pet cats.⁶ Cats are prolific breeders, with just one unneutered female capable of giving birth to around 18 kittens a year. One unneutered female cat can give rise to 20,000 descendants in just five years, so it's easy to see how cat numbers can rapidly get out of control.

Owners who allow female cats to have multiple litters may hand them over to rehoming charities such as Cats Protection. Alternatively they may rely on family, friends or neighbours to care for them. These unplanned kittens are all too often the ones which become unwanted and abandoned adult cats.

Cats Protection's Belfast Adoption Centre Manager Bel Livingstone said: "Failure to neuter results in unplanned litters and more and more cats coming into our care. This stretches our resources and our capacity to help cats in need in Northern Ireland, and it is a challenge to rehome them all."

Feral cats are those which did not have human contact as young kittens and so have never been domesticated. This may be because their mothers were stray or feral cats themselves. Often, ferals form large communities called colonies which many landowners, farmers and smallholders value for their ability to control pests. However, if left unchecked, these colonies can grow too large. Feral cats share the same protection as domestic cats under the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 and it is illegal to use inhumane methods to deal with colonies. In order to control the number of ferals, Cats Protection has carried out Trap, Neuter and Return programmes for many years in Northern Ireland. This humane method ensures cats can continue to live in their environment while preventing a feral colony from increasing in size.

Cat breeding is unregulated in Northern Ireland. There is some self-regulation and good breeding practice in the UK, particularly among those who breed and register pedigree cats with bodies such as The Governing Council of Cat Fancy. Regulation of commercial cat breeding already exists in EU countries including Belgium and the Netherlands and in various US states and parts of Australia.

Recommendations

- Collaboration between the Northern Irish Government, animal welfare charities and professional bodies to encourage more cat owners to neuter their cats
- Northern Irish Government support for community projects that encourage cat neutering and responsible pet ownership
- Local council collaboration with Cats Protection to develop a training programme for Animal Welfare Officers to better understand how to carry out their own Trap, Neuter and Return programmes of feral cat colonies
- New regulations under the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 to regulate the breeding and sale of cats
- Consideration of a new Code of Practice under the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 covering the breeding of cats
- Collaboration with animal welfare charities and professional bodies in Northern Ireland to develop mandatory training and accreditation for those that breed and sell cats
- New regulations on pet vending under the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 including a ban on the sale of kittens in pet shops
- Northern Irish Government review of UK and EU best practice and regulatory frameworks governing cat breeding
- Collaboration between the Northern Irish Government and animal welfare charities and professional bodies to develop a 'kitten checklist' to guide consumers who purchase a kitten



Microchipping: making it compulsory to microchip owned cats

Microchipping is the safe and permanent method of identification Cats Protection recommends for cats. It increases the chances of a lost or injured cat being safely reunited with their owner. And it can also identify a cat that has been killed in a road accident, saving their owner much distress.

But despite the benefits, only 39 per cent of owned cats in Northern Ireland are microchipped, far below the UK-wide average of 55 per cent. This means 80,000 cats are not microchipped. When we take an unchipped cat into our care it can be very difficult to trace an owner and may well result in us rehoming a cat needlessly.

As well as promoting microchipping to owners, Cats Protection also encourages local authorities to scan cats which have been killed in road accidents. Simple, handheld scanners carried by road sweeping teams can easily identify cats which have been microchipped so that owners can be informed. This quick and easy routine can save an owner the distress of not knowing what has happened to a missing cat, not to mention the time and money spent searching for a much-loved pet.

Northern Ireland has already led the way when it comes to microchipping – it was the first of the devolved administrations to make it compulsory for dogs. Wales,⁷ Scotland⁸ and England⁹ will all follow in 2016. Microchipping of cats is already compulsory in some countries, for example Spain, France and parts of Australia.

Recommendations

- Regulations to introduce compulsory microchipping of owned cats
- A Northern Irish Government-led review of EU and non-EU best practice in countries where microchipping of owned cats is already compulsory
- Collaboration with the Northern Irish Government and Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly to promote the benefits of microchipping cats (including support for initiatives like National Microchipping Month every June)

Ozzie's story

A globetrotting stray showed the entire world the power of microchipping when he turned up in County Armagh – some 9,000 miles from his original home in Australia. The 15 year old was handed into Cats Protection's Armagh Branch after being found scavenging for food in a garden. Volunteers were stunned when a routine scan revealed he had a chip registered in Sydney, Australia and spent weeks unravelling his international adventures. The mystery was solved after his owners were traced and explained he had gone missing after the family brought him to the UK on a pet passport. Sadly Ozzie's travelling days came to an end a few weeks later when he suffered kidney failure and died. But Ozzie's story remains an example of the power of microchips – and a reminder to keep microchip details up-to-date.





Cats entering the UK:
creating a national database to ensure that a central record is kept of all cats entering the UK legally so those entering illegally without a rabies vaccine can be identified without delay

A total of 43,829 cats and kittens were recorded as having entered the UK legally under the EU Pet Travel Scheme (PETS) in the three years to 2014.¹⁰ PETS governs the non-commercial movement of pets. Cats Protection is concerned where cats or kittens enter the country unchecked and/or illegally as this presents a potential public health risk as well as a threat to animal welfare. Just one cat or kitten smuggled in could put Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK at risk of a case of rabies or other infectious diseases.

In November 2013 a cat was identified in Paris as having rabies.¹¹ In May 2015, a dog which had been taken to Algeria illegally died from rabies after returning to the Rhône-Alpes region of France. Currently there is no centralised database recording all pet cats entering the country under the PETS scheme. Such a database would confirm that a cat had been checked, scanned for a microchip and had entered the country legally. Currently only animals that are declared get checked before entering the UK.

Cats Protection is one of 40 animal welfare members of Eurogroup for Animals, recognised by the European parliament as the leading body representing animal welfare issues in the EU. In 2015, the group launched a campaign to unify pet microchip databases within Europe, a move which will make it easier to determine where an animal has come from.

Recommendations

- Creation of a national database that registers details of all companion animals that have entered the country legitimately. The database should be linked to an EU database which is accessible across the EU to maximise traceability
- Northern Irish Government guidance for local authorities, trading standards officers, and welfare charities on procedures to follow if a cat is suspected of being an illegal import (including specific guidance on when to quarantine)
- Random checking of vehicles to look for cats and dogs that are being smuggled into the UK





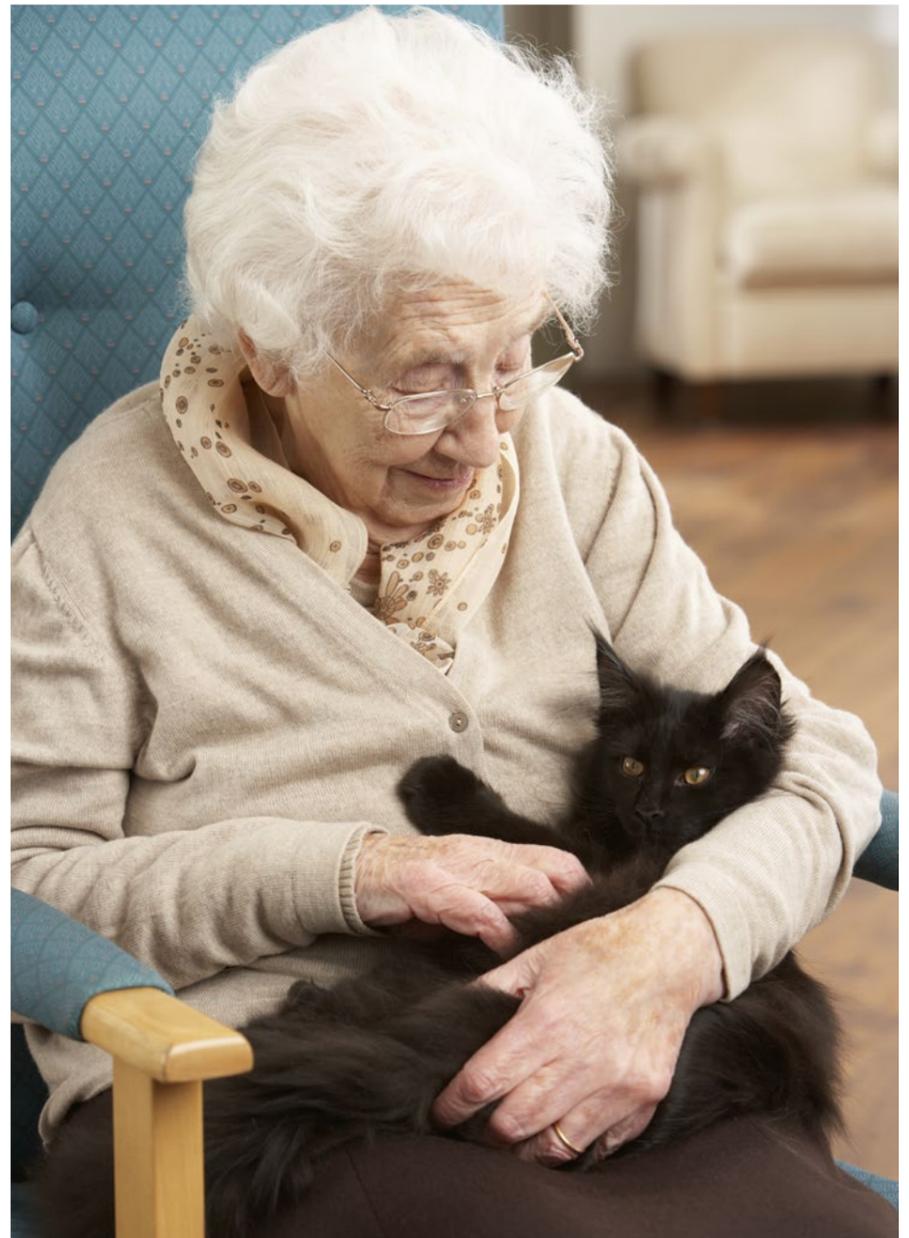
Cats and housing providers: Northern Irish Government recognition of the needs of people with cats or other companion animals in rented housing and care homes to allow people to keep their pets

More and more of us do not own the homes we live in. Many of us now have landlords or managers whether in privately rented, social or care home accommodation. Refusal by a housing provider to allow pets was the third most common reason cats were given up to our Belfast Adoption Centre for rehoming in 2015.

More needs to be done to encourage housing providers and landlords to have pet-friendly policies and pet tenancy clauses. According to one of the major online guides to care homes, nursing homes and residential homes, currently only 32 per cent in Northern Ireland say they take "pets by arrangement".¹³

Recommendations

- Northern Irish Government to encourage more social housing associations and private landlords to allow tenants to keep companion animals
- Northern Irish Government to encourage and promote good practice whereby local authorities, social housing associations and private landlords have pet-friendly tenancy clauses
- Northern Irish Government to work closely with animal welfare charities to encourage more care homes, sheltered housing and retirement complexes to allow new residents to have cats





Dog attacks on cats: full use of measures within dog legislation to minimise dog attacks on cats and promote responsible dog ownership

In the first six months of 2015 over four cats a month were reported in the UK press as having been the victim of a dog attack. Sadly 70 per cent of these dog attacks on cats were reported as fatal.¹⁴

The vast majority of dog owners are responsible and keep their dogs under control. Yet there are cases when dogs kill or injure cats and other animals, attacks which can denote a dangerous dog. Too frequently cases are reported when a child is fatally injured by a dog that has previously attacked a cat.

Under the Dogs Amendment Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, it is an offence to set a dog on any other animal owned by another person. It is also an offence if a dog attacks and injures any other animal owned by another person. No offence is committed if that animal is trespassing on the land of the dog owner, keeper or other person in charge of it.

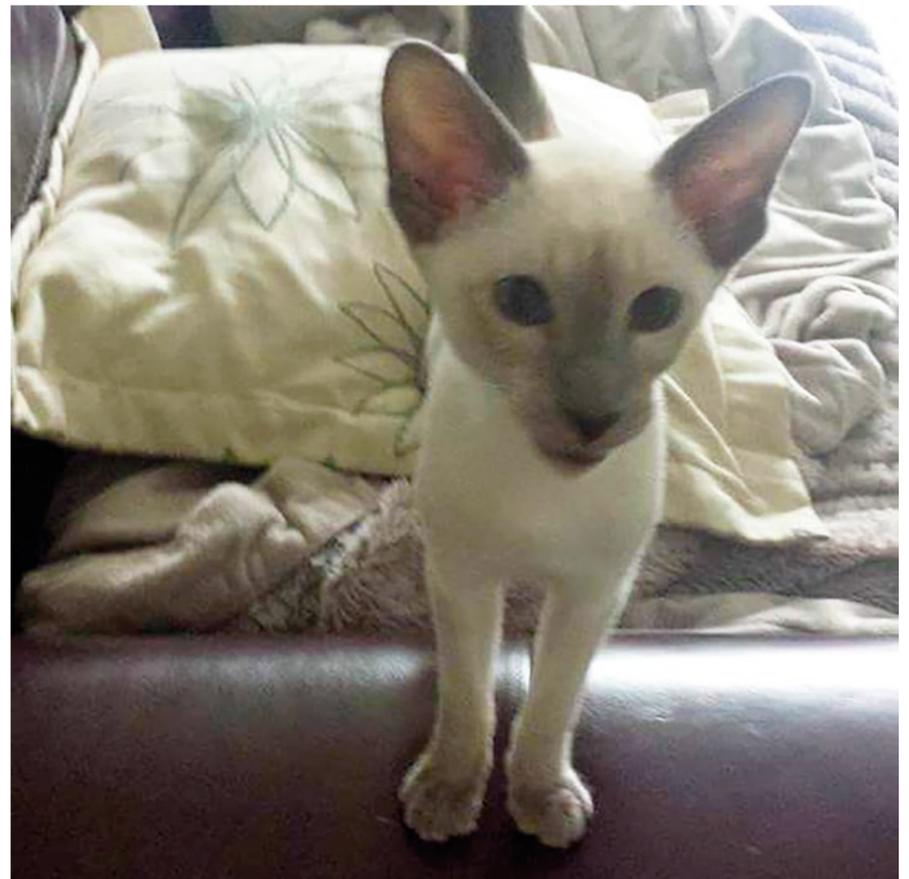
Cats Protection has heard of highly distressing cases where pet cats have been deliberately used as bait for fighting dogs. Cases such as these mean that on occasions we have to suspend homing cats into certain areas, or issue warnings to cat owners to be vigilant. As part of the review of the implementation of the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, Cats Protection has called for the maximum sentence to be imposed where there is clear evidence that dogs have deliberately been set on cats.

Recommendations

- Full use of preventative measures within the Dogs Amendment Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 to minimise dog attacks on cats and promote responsible dog ownership
- Review of the implementation of maximum sentencing where cats have deliberately been set upon by dogs
- Government coordination of data evidencing dog attacks on cats in Northern Ireland and monitoring of the use by enforcers of preventative anti-social behaviour measures

Lola's story

A Whiteabbey woman is warning pet owners to be vigilant after her beloved cat was "ripped apart" by what she believes were hunting dogs. Her 18-month-old cat Lola had been resting on the garden fence of her home when she was attacked by two large dogs. Lola's distraught owner said: "I heard the most horrendous cry, which I will never forget. It was the sound of Lola letting out her last cry." Lola's owner is now calling for tougher laws to prosecute irresponsible dog owners and for cat owners to report suspicious behaviour to the dog warden. "None of this will ever bring Lola back but if Lola's story can raise awareness and help prevent any other family suffering from the loss of a much-loved pet and family member then it will bring some comfort knowing that her death saved others."¹⁵





Cats and their benefit to health and wellbeing: Northern Irish Government recognition of the benefits cats and other companion animals bring to health and personal wellbeing

Cats can help alleviate social isolation and make particularly suitable companion animals for people with chronic health problems, limited mobility or who are housebound. Cats have also been proven to help reduce the risks of physical conditions such as cardiovascular disease.¹⁶

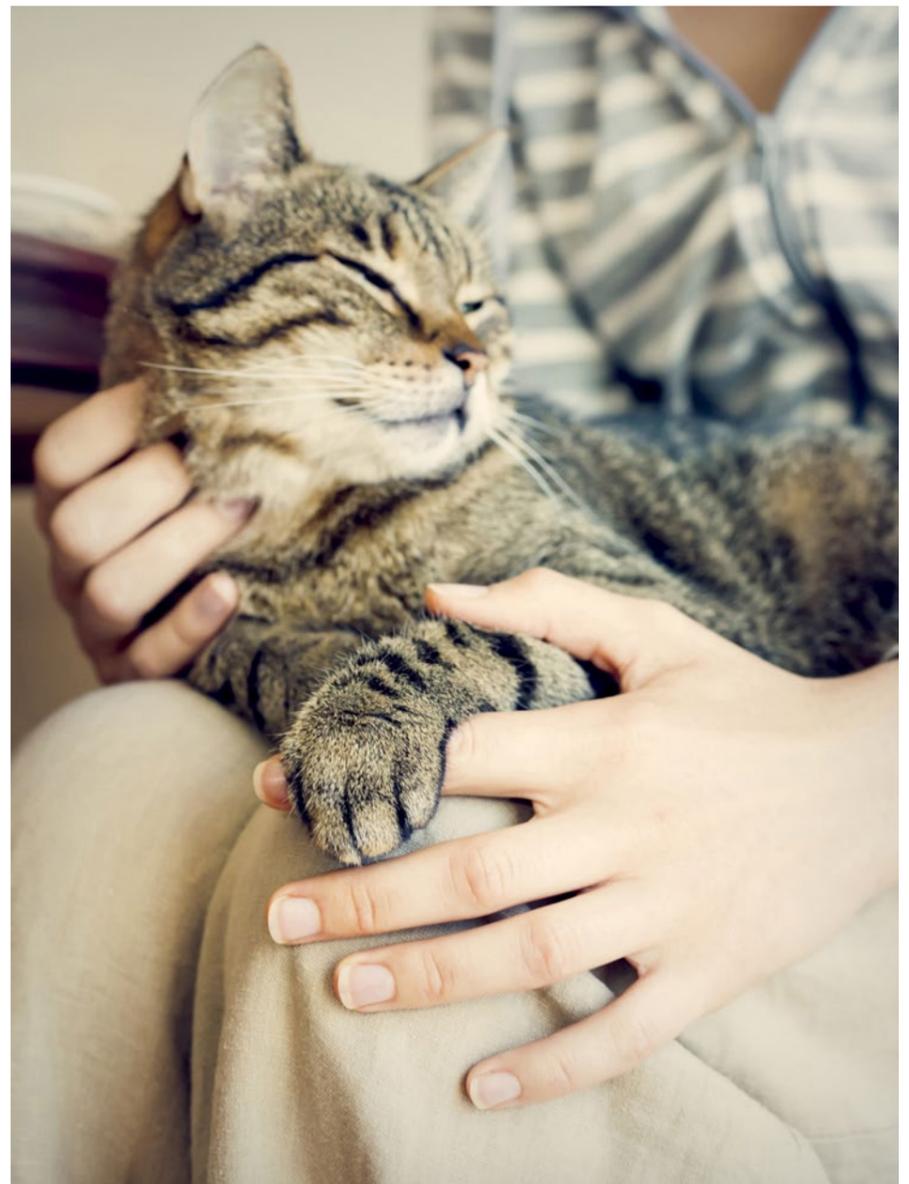
The Transforming Your Care (TYC) report published in 2011,¹⁷ set out a future model for the delivery of health and social care to meet future challenges. TYC advised providing more care in homes rather than hospitals and supporting people to live independently and healthily.

Some of the 99 TYC recommendations include providing a holistic and consistent approach to the assessment of older people's needs, personalised care designed to deliver the outcomes care users and their families want, and personalised care pathways enabling home-based management of long term conditions with expanded support from the independent sector.¹⁸

Cats Protection believes it is vital that the role cats and other companion pets play in supporting individual wellbeing is not forgotten in the Transforming Your Care programme. We'd encourage imaginative initiatives such as Companion Animal Support Programmes which already happen in Australia.¹⁹

Recommendations

- Clarification from the Northern Irish Government that cats and other pets can be vital to an individual's wellbeing and that health professionals and local government social services should take this into consideration when assessing a person's care needs
- Formal communication by the Northern Irish Government with local government and health professionals to encourage consideration of the value of pets to wellbeing within care assessments
- Northern Irish Government monitoring to ensure that assessments and personalised care plans include consideration of any companion animals that form part of the individual's household and that benefit wellbeing





Labelling products toxic to cats: clear labelling of flowers, plants and household products that are toxic to cats so owners know which to avoid

Cats are very susceptible to poisoning and a number of household products can be fatal to them. Many consumers, who are also cat owners, aren't aware of the toxicity of products such as disinfectants and weed killers.

Labelling of toxic products has been governed by the European Classification of Labelling and Packaging regulation since 1 June 2015. This regulation is aimed at protecting people and the environment. We would like to go beyond what is legally required and ensure product labels warn consumers of a product's toxicity to animals.

A number of plants – lilies in particular – can also be fatal. Despite years of effort by Cats Protection and The Cat Group²⁰ many supermarkets still do not have accurately worded and prominent warnings on their lily bouquets. All parts of lilies, not just the pollen, are toxic to cats.

Recommendations

- Northern Irish Government to work with manufacturers and distributors to encourage them to voluntarily place warnings on products and plants highlighting their toxicity to animals as well as to people
- Northern Irish Government encouragement to manufacturers of toxic products (such as antifreeze) to develop non-toxic alternatives
- Joint working with Northern Irish Government to raise public awareness about the toxicity of certain household products and plants

Words of warning

Warnings should be prominently positioned on the front of bouquets containing flowers which are toxic to cats, such as lilies. In the case of lilies, the label should warn owners that all parts are dangerous, including the stem, leaves, pollen and flower and that cats can become ill after chewing them or simply by brushing past before licking their fur.





Welfare of cats in Northern Ireland: greater investment in raising public awareness of the five welfare needs of animals and better enforcement of existing laws to improve how cases of neglect and mistreatment of cats are reported and dealt with

With a major review taking place of the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011,²¹ there has never been a better time to improve the lives of cats in Northern Ireland. Cats Protection has been increasingly concerned about how this Act has been enforced and welcomes moves to improve its effectiveness. We have added our voice to the review, in particular on issues to tackle cruelty and neglect.

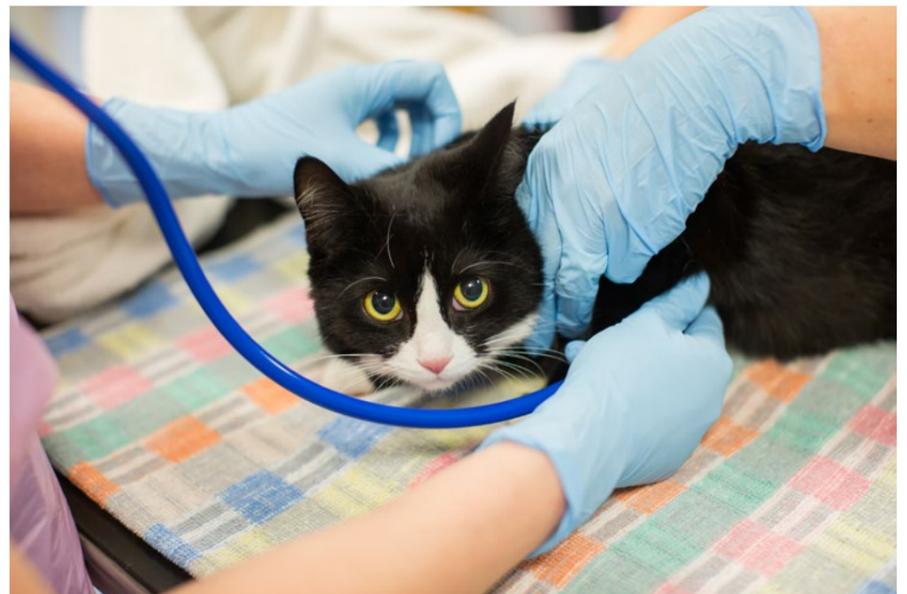
While our remit focuses on rehoming and education, we regularly see the horrific consequences where cats have been mistreated and we support maximum sentences being imposed in cases where there is clear evidence of guilt in animal cruelty cases.

Animal Welfare Officers employed by local authorities are responsible for investigating animal cruelty, but all too often Cats Protection is contacted by members of the public reporting instances of neglect. We believe a single, dedicated public telephone hotline is long overdue and this most basic facility would provide the public with a much needed fast route to report instances of mistreatment.

We believe that investment in public education and raising awareness of the five welfare needs of animals is vital to improving the long-term wellbeing of cats in Northern Ireland.

Recommendations

- Regular collaboration between Animal Welfare Officers and Cats Protection including information sharing and the opportunity for Animal Welfare Officers to shadow and train alongside Cats Protection volunteers and staff
- Creation of a bespoke telephone hotline so that charities and organisations such as Cats Protection have a fast and direct route to communicate information and concerns to welfare officers about animal cruelty cases that come in to them
- Clearer guidance to the public about how they should deal with an animal welfare incident including clarification of the respective roles of animal welfare charities and Local Authority Officers





Animal welfare education: inclusion of animal welfare in the Northern Irish curriculum so that all children learn about responsible pet care

Education is vital to tackling the animal welfare issues which impact Northern Ireland, such as rising numbers of stray and abandoned cats as well as cruelty cases. Promoting responsible cat care among all age groups is the key to finding a long-term solution to these problems.

Children are the pet owners of tomorrow and it's essential they leave school with an understanding of how to care for and respect animals. Yet it is clear there is a desperate need for greater awareness of responsible cat care among the general public too. At our Belfast Adoption Centre, one of the top five reasons for owners giving up cats for the past three years has been 'Doesn't want cat anymore'.²² This indicates a worrying lack of understanding of the responsibilities involved in taking on a pet.

Education is central to Cats Protection's work in Northern Ireland. In the academic year 2014-2015, our education volunteers delivered over 100 talks to schools and community groups reaching an audience of nearly 2,500 people. But there is much to be done to reach more communities. To help us reach marginal audiences, Cats Protection would welcome joint working with the Northern Ireland Government and professional bodies to gain accreditation for our education resources.

Educating communities²⁴

Cats Protection's Belfast Adoption Centre has been reaching out across communities since launching its education programme in 2015. Through talks, mailshots and displays in public spaces such as supermarkets, the scheme aims to improve public awareness of neutering and the basic welfare needs of cats. Manager Bel Livingstone said: "We witness on a daily basis the effects of people not properly understanding the responsibility of pet ownership, from unwanted kittens to abandoned cats. We want to do something that changes the way people think about cats and we're hoping our messages will spread throughout whole communities. We're finding people are genuinely interested and keen to engage with us and there's definitely a real willingness to help improve animal welfare in general in Northern Ireland."

Recommendations

- Inclusion of animal welfare in the Northern Ireland curriculum and recognition of the preventative impact of teaching animal welfare and responsible pet ownership to schoolchildren
- Northern Irish Government collaboration with professional bodies to endorse voluntary sector education resources
- Support by Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly for Cats Protection's education activities locally





Banning snares: an outright ban on the use of snares on the basis they are inhumane and cruel and inflict suffering, injury or death upon animals caught in them, including cats

Cats Protection supports a ban on the use of all types of snares across Northern Ireland on the basis that their use is inherently cruel and inhumane. Snares inflict considerable suffering and injury on animals and cats are often the victims. They are commonly used by gamekeepers and other landowners to protect game birds from predation. The 'target species' are generally foxes and, to a lesser extent, rabbits.

Cats Protection welcomed the announcement by Environment Minister Mark H Durkan that he will take more time to consider any legislative changes to the Snares Order (Northern Ireland). The Order was intended to amend current regulations on snaring and its delay leaves open the opportunity for an outright ban on snares.²³

Snares are indiscriminate – statistics gathered in 2015 showed that 71 per cent of reported cases where animals were caught in snares involved non-target species. Of these, nearly a quarter (24 per cent) were cats.²⁴

There are alternatives to snares available to land managers for both rabbit and fox control, for example, the use of various types of fencing (electric, buried and underground). Some types of snares are already banned in Northern Ireland and there is a Code of Practice in place relating to legal snares. However, these legal snares are frequently found to be defective,²⁵ or are not checked, leaving animals to suffer agonising injuries or a slow, painful death.

Recommendations

- Introduction in Northern Ireland of an outright ban on the use of snares on the basis that they are inhumane and cruel and inflict suffering, injury or death on cats and other animals caught in them

Three out of four people in Northern Ireland said snaring should be banned.

– Ipsos MORI poll, 2015²⁶



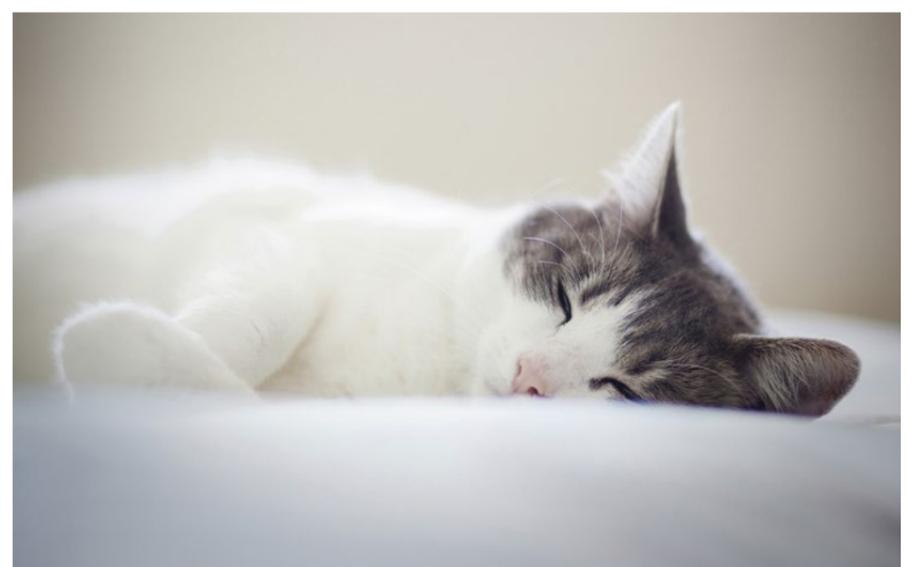
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