

The Cat Manifesto

Northern Ireland



CATS
PROTECTION

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Manifesto overview

Cats Protection campaigns to make sure cats are not forgotten by decision makers. Sadly, many cats continue to be victims of cruelty, neglect and poor welfare.

We campaign on areas relevant to cat welfare to improve the lives of cats and to protect them from harm.

We're determined to stand up for every cat who needs us, no matter how difficult the circumstances.



Give cats their best life

All cats in Northern Ireland should have the best start and go on to be well cared for throughout their life. Pedigree cats are becoming more popular, so more people are trying to find ways to make a profit at the expense of the welfare of cats and kittens. Sometimes, even people with good intentions can harm cats by housing them inappropriately. Cats Protection is calling for changes to the law to give cats their best possible life.

- **Review regulations on the sale of cats**, including banning third-party sales of kittens and prohibiting the sale of kittens under eight weeks of age, to improve welfare standards
- **Introduce cat breeding regulations** to protect the welfare of cats and kittens
- **Ban the breeding of cats with extreme characteristics** which cause pain and suffering
- **Regulate animal rescues, rehoming organisations and pounds** to protect the animals in their care
- **Tackle activities that are harmful to cats**, such as cat cafés, cat yoga and cat daycare. These are rising in popularity and must be subjected to restrictions
- **Regulate those who provide activities involving cats**, such as cat groomers and cat sitters, and update cattery regulations



1. Review regulations on the sale of cats

The issue

The sale of cats in Northern Ireland is largely unregulated. This can lead to poor welfare practices and cats being sold sick and underage.

Why it matters

Unlike the rest of the UK, kittens can be sold at any age and there is no ban on the third-party sale of kittens. Unscrupulous sellers can operate without checks and put profits over cat welfare. Kittens that are removed from their mother before eight weeks can develop health and behaviour issues.

What needs to change?

To give cats their best life, Cats Protection is calling on the Northern Ireland Executive to:

- continue to engage with the animal welfare sector on plans to ban the third party-sales of puppies and kittens, including considering how feral and stray cats will fit into registration proposals
- ensure that councils are given adequate funding and training to enforce any new system to regulate the sale of cats



2. Regulate cat breeding

The issue

Beyond the protections in the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, there are no safeguards for kittens, pregnant or nursing cats and male stud cats.

Female cats in ill health may be overbred, giving birth to repeated litters in poor conditions and producing kittens that are sick and diseased. Male stud cats can also experience poor welfare, by being kept in inadequate accommodation with a lack of essential items, such as litter trays and food bowls, and opportunities to express their natural instincts and behaviours.

Why it matters

Unfortunately, some people seeking to profit from breeding cats care more about how much money they can make than they do about the welfare of the cats they breed. Buying cats is the most popular way cat owners in Northern Ireland acquire their pets¹. This makes cats increasingly popular targets for unscrupulous breeders looking to make a quick profit, especially given prices for popular pedigree kittens range from £800 to £2,000 on selling sites like Pets4Homes.

Cats Protection believes introducing cat breeding regulations alongside the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs' proposals to ban the third-party sale of puppies and kittens will strengthen traceability, improve cat welfare and clamp down on breeders looking to exploit cats for money.

There has been a significant increase in pedigree cats: For the first time, more pedigree cats were acquired in the last 12 months than moggies².



What needs to change?

To give cats their best life Cats Protection is calling on the Northern Ireland Executive to regulate cat breeding as a licensable activity so that a licence is required for anyone breeding two or more litters per year (be it from a single cat or multiple cats in the same premises). This would work alongside a registration system.

Conditions of the licence will require that:

- a single cat should have no more than six litters in their lifetime and a maximum of three litters within a two-year period
- a female cat should not be bred after six years of age due to the increased risk of difficulty during labour, birth defects in the kittens and physiological stress

Cats Protection, alongside cat and vet organisations, has produced a kitten checklist to help potential owners to ensure they choose a happy and healthy kitten. View the kitten checklist at cats.org.uk/buying-a-kitten

¹ Cats Protection Cats and Their Stats (CATS) Northern Ireland Report 2025
² Ibid 1

3. Ban the breeding of cats with extreme characteristics

The issue

Over the last 200 years, cats have increasingly been bred with distinctive characteristics to make them look a certain way. Unfortunately, these distinctive physical characteristics are increasingly becoming extreme and over-exaggerated. Extreme physical characteristics can cause serious health and welfare issues.

Why it matters

Breeds with extreme characteristics are often seen as particularly desirable and breeders can sell them for very large sums of money. Certain extreme characteristics of concern are being popularised by celebrities and social media; unfortunately, the public aren't always aware of the health and welfare conditions of these cats and the pain they may be suffering.

What needs to change?

To give cats their best life, Cats Protection is calling on the Northern Ireland Executive to:

- update guidance on cat breeders to include more breeds of concern, such as exotic wildcat hybrids
- work with the animal welfare sector to create an Innate Health Assessment tool for cats to help measure extreme characteristics
- support council inspectors to spot breeds of concern or cats with extreme characteristics
- work with animal welfare organisations, including Cats Protection, to raise public awareness of the welfare and behavioural issues of certain extreme breeds and exotic wildcat hybrids



Cats with extreme characteristics



Scottish Folds are known for their folded ears and 'round' appearance. However, the mutation causing the folded ear affects the whole body and causes Scottish Folds to have serious health problems causing continuous and debilitating pain in all cats of this breed.

Some people think Scottish Folds are calm and 'laid back' but this is likely to be because they are in pain when they move, jump or play.



Extreme flat-faced Persians have brachycephalic features (this is when the cats have been bred to have a very short muzzle length and a 'squashed' appearance to their face) which cause difficulty breathing.

They also:

- have protruding eyes which are more susceptible to injury and infection
- are more likely to have dermatitis from facial skin folds
- have a deformed jaw making them more prone to dental disease. This can make eating and grooming painful



Wildcat hybrids are a cross between domestic cats and exotic wildcats. The mating and birthing process often represents a real danger for the domestic cat (the female). Offspring are often poorly suited temperamentally to life in a domestic environment, exhibiting territorial behaviour and are stressed when kept as pets within the home. These are essentially wild cats. They also represent a threat to neighbourhood cats if let outside to roam free. The price of hybrid kittens can reach thousands of pounds, fuelling demand for hybrid cat breeding and risking the illegal importation of exotic wildcats for breeding purposes.

Cats with extreme characteristics



XL Bully cats (also known as 'Dwelf' cats) are a concerning new cat breed. These cats are created by crossing the Sphynx, American Curl and Munchkin to produce a cat which resembles the XL Bully dog. These cats suffer from physical deformities, including shortened legs, hairlessness, excessively wrinkled skin and curled ears. They are likely to suffer from painful skin conditions and severe joint problems, causing continuous and debilitating pain. These cats are prevented from carrying out normal behaviours essential for their welfare, affecting their ability to live a good quality of life.



Munchkin cats have a form of dwarfism and suffer from joint deformities which can reduce their mobility and ability to exhibit normal cat behaviour. They frequently have spinal problems and early onset arthritis, causing pain and distress.

Breeding for deformity is unethical and causes unacceptable pain and suffering. The XL Bully cat, Scottish Fold and Munchkin are not recognised by the Governing Council of the Cat Fancy (GCCF) for pedigree registration due to these welfare concerns. These cats should not be promoted in any way, for example, through social media or by their presence at cat shows. The public should not buy these cats under any circumstances; doing so is irresponsible, as it promotes popularity and leads to more cats with these issues being born to suffer.

4. Regulate animal rescues, rehoming organisations and pounds

The issue

Animal rescue and rehoming organisations include individuals or organisations that take in vulnerable companion animals on a regular basis, with the intention of rehabilitating, rehoming or providing long-term care. There is one council operated pound that takes in cats. While anyone caring for animals must meet their five welfare needs set out in the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, there is no specific regulation of animal welfare establishments in place.

Why it matters

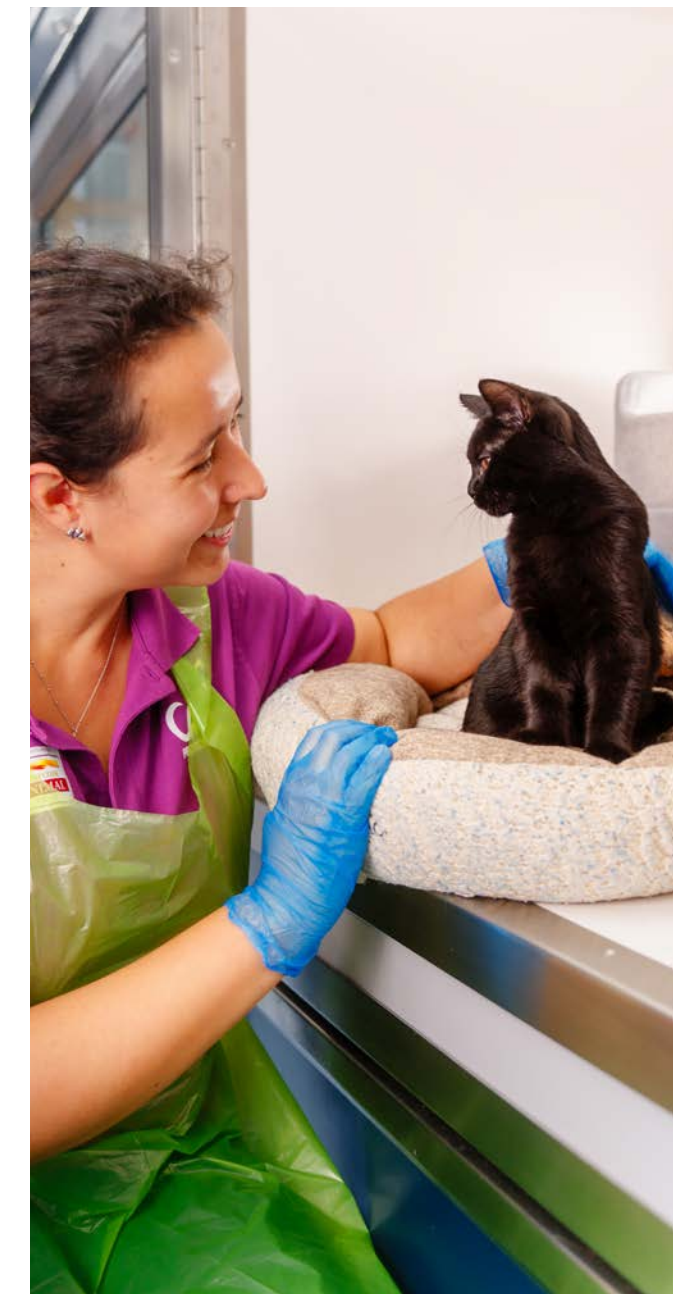
Those who take animals into their care usually do so with the very best of intentions. But sometimes the standards of animal welfare in such settings can fall short, perhaps due to a lack of training, resources or equipment, or because of a desire to help more animals than the establishment can manage.

What needs to change?

To give cats their best life, Cats Protection is calling on the Northern Ireland Executive to:

- regulate animal rescues, rehoming organisations and pounds and introduce a minimum set of standards to protect the welfare of those animals. This would need to be properly enforced by inspectors with specialist training
- introduce a publicly accessible national database of licensed animal welfare establishments. This should outline relevant conditions, for example, the number and type of animals permitted, and detail any breach or revocation of licence

- ban cats being transported from abroad for rescue. Such journeys can be stressful for cats, risk the introduction of disease and make it more difficult to rehome the many cats already in need of a home in the UK. A more effective way to help cats in need abroad is to support local charities running neutering and education programmes



5. End unsuitable activities involving cats, including cat cafés

The issue

Some activities which allow people to mix with cats in social environments pose significant welfare risks to cats.

Why it matters

Cat cafés can be extremely stressful for cats, as they are solitary animals by nature and do not generally choose to live in social groups. This means that the enforced proximity to many other cats and having to share food, water and hiding and sleeping locations can cause stress and anxiety. Cats depend upon a predictable, stable environment. Cat cafés can be unsettling for cats, with different people coming and going and with strange smells and noises encroaching on their sense of security. Although there are no cat cafés in Northern Ireland, Cats Protection is calling for a ban before the practice starts.

Cat yoga is likely to be stressful to cats for the same reasons. Usually, during yoga sessions, there are limited hiding places for cats and often their water and litter trays are in a separate area which they cannot access.

Cats Protection believes that people who care about the wellbeing of cats would not want them to be exploited and would therefore not wish to encourage the launch of these establishments.

What needs to change?

To give cats their best life, Cats Protection is calling on the Northern Ireland Executive to:

- introduce a list of activities unsuitable for animals due to the impact on their welfare. For cats, this should include cat cafés, cat yoga and cat daycare

“Cats are a species that relies heavily on routine, stability and predictability. They value freedom of choice and control over their environment. In settings such as cat cafés or cat yoga sessions, these fundamental needs are often compromised or disregarded. Cats are a solitary species by nature. Being forced into close contact with other cats and unfamiliar people can lead to chronic stress.

“Stress in cats doesn’t only impact their mental state but is linked to a wide range of health and behavioural issues such as urinary conditions, gastrointestinal issues, aggressive behaviours towards other cats or to humans, self-mutilation and fearful behaviours, to name a few. Environments with constant changes in smells, varying levels of noise and unfamiliar people will cause distress for a lot of cats. These spaces often don’t allow cats to retreat to safe spaces, which is essential for good cat welfare.

“Although it’s admirable that some use cat cafés as a way to advertise cats for rehoming, the constant changing of cats within the environment means there isn’t a stable social grouping, and this will cause distress, especially during introductions. While these activities may be designed for human enjoyment, they are rarely compatible with what a cat needs to thrive.”

Sammie Ravenscroft,
Regional Community Behaviourist

6. Regulate activities involving cats, including cat grooming and cat boarding

The issue

As a popular pet, there are several services and businesses that have sprung up to cater to cats and their owners. Many dog groomers now offer cat grooming services, with high demand leading to some cat-only grooming businesses. Cat owners often use cat sitters or catteries to look after their pets when away. Although catteries are regulated under the Animal Boarding Establishments Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1974, the rest of these activities remain largely unregulated.

Why it matters

Cats are very clean animals and like to groom themselves, but sometimes they may need a little help. For some cats, if they are not regularly groomed, their fur can become matted and uncomfortable. Competent groomers can help to avoid the development of problems and prevent mats needing to be removed under anaesthetic by a vet.

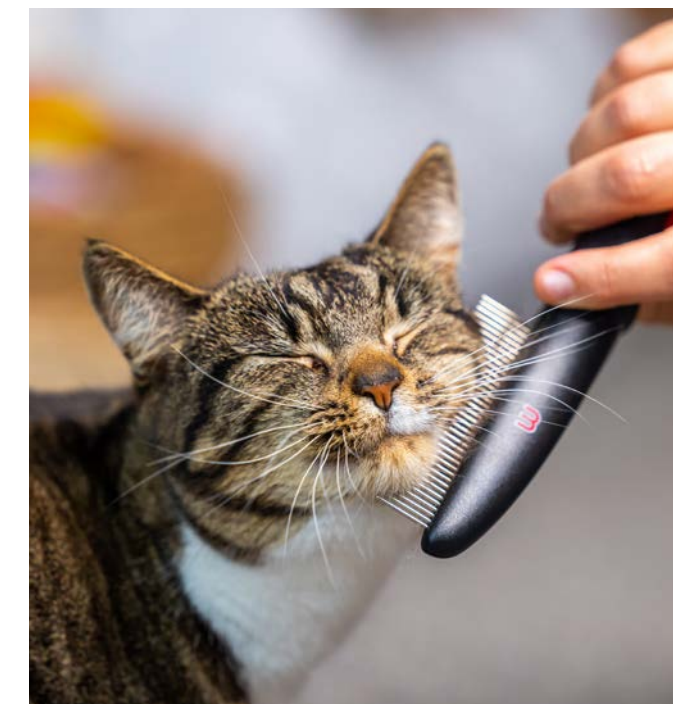
Unfortunately, there is no regulation of groomers in Northern Ireland and no minimum qualification to become a groomer. This poses risks to cats’ physical and psychological welfare. There are also concerns around groomers offering anaesthesia-free dental cleaning for cats.

Many cat owners rely on trusted friends, family or neighbours to care for their beloved pets while they’re away. These informal arrangements are often based on personal relationships and a deep understanding of the cat’s individual needs. However, hiring a commercial cat sitter introduces certain risks. These businesses often serve multiple clients, and there is no guarantee that these individuals have the necessary training, experience, or knowledge about feline welfare.

What needs to change?

To give cats their best life, Cats Protection is calling on the Northern Ireland Executive to:

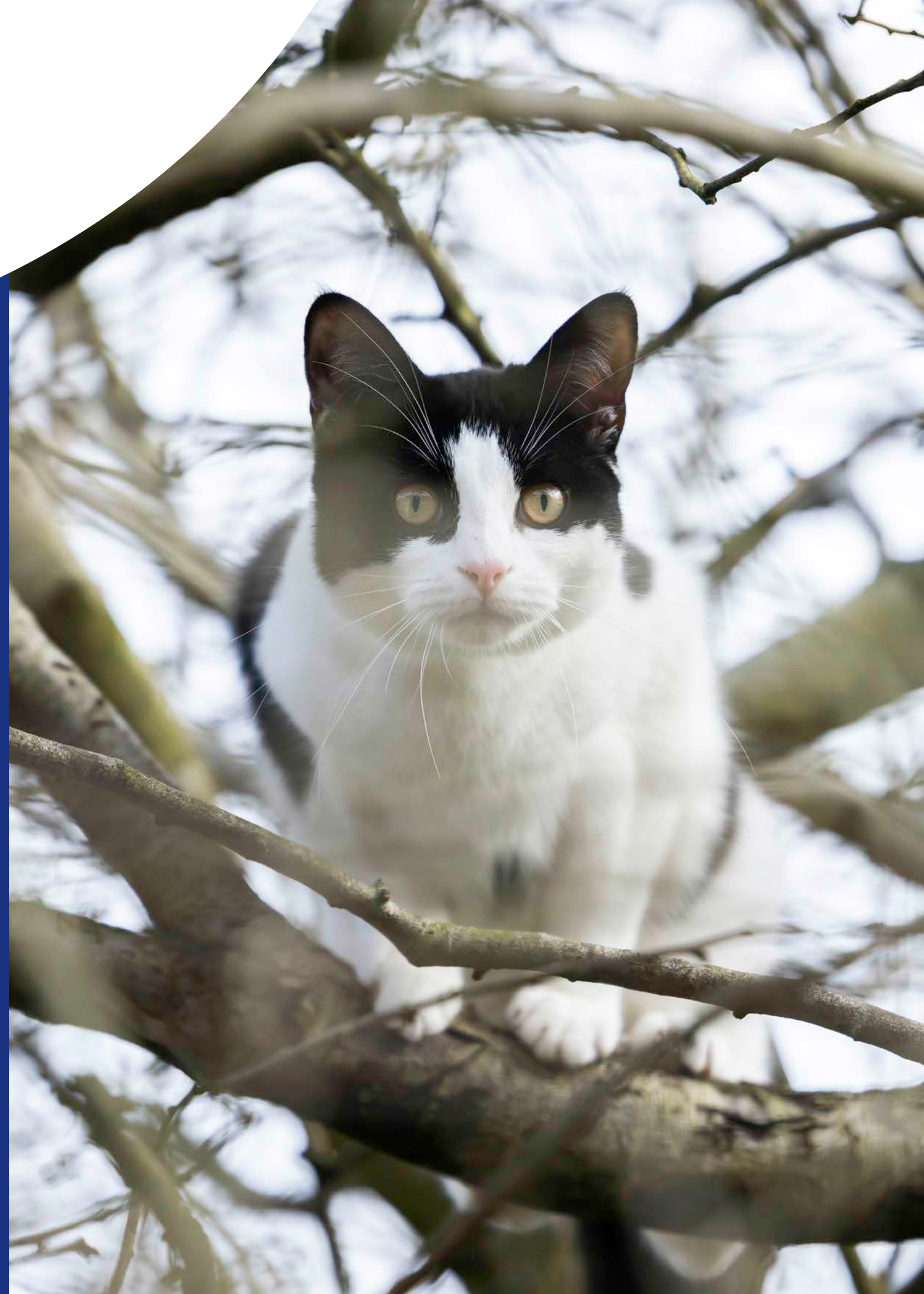
- regulate cat grooming. Conditions should require all cat groomers to hold a minimum qualification that ensures they meet minimum standards of cat-friendly cat handling to meet licensing requirements. Inspections should be carried out to ensure groomers are not breaching the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966 by offering sedation for grooming or invasive dental cleaning
- update the legislation on animal boarding to reflect modern welfare standards and services being offered to care for pets
- regulate commercial cat sitting. Conditions should require all commercial cat sitters to complete a recognised training course, demonstrating their knowledge of cat welfare and care in line with the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 and the Code of Practice for the Welfare of Cats



End cruelty to cats

Cats face violence and cruelty far too often. Animal cruelty laws have been made stronger in recent years but deliberate cruelty to cats is still frequent. Cats Protection is calling for stronger laws to protect cats from cruelty.

- **End the sale and use of cruel aversive training devices like electronic shock collars**, which cause pain, fear and stress
- **Ensure legal protections for feral cats** to protect them from being treated inhumanely and wrongly targeted as pests



1. Ban the sale and use of cruel training devices

The issue

Aversive training devices such as electronic shock collars can legally be used on cats, for example if the cat starts to go somewhere the owner doesn't want them to go.

Why it matters

Aversive training devices cause pain as well as fear and stress. They are also known to lead to behavioural problems and to break down the trust between owner and pet.

All types of devices designed to deliver pain or other unpleasant sensation, have the same impact and are bad for an animal's health and wellbeing.

What needs to change?

To end cruelty to cats, Cats Protection is calling on the Northern Ireland Executive to:

- ban the sale and use of cruel training devices such as electronic shock collars. **The use of electronic shock collars can cause pain, fear and distress**



"There are several different electronic training devices available to modify an animal's behaviour, including electronic 'scat' mats designed to train the animal to avoid certain areas of the home, and electronic boundary or 'freedom fences', used to keep cats within certain boundaries, such as within a garden. These devices deliver an unpleasant shock to force the animal to comply with the owner's desired behaviour.

"In addition to the pain and distress caused, these devices may cause burns or wounds, can cause negative behaviours such as aggression and toileting problems, and have the potential to malfunction.

"Cats Protection is against the sale and use of electronic training devices that deliver an electric shock. We believe that there should be a ban on the sale of electronic training devices. This includes a ban on hand-held remote-controlled electronic shock collars, electronic containment fencing, and mats that deliver a shock on contact. Cat owners should consider non-electronic solutions to control where cats can roam, such as non-electronic cat-proof fencing."

Alison Richards, Chief Veterinary Officer, Cats Protection

2. Ensure legal protections for feral cats

The issue

Feral cats are domestic cats that are generally free living as single or colony cats with little or no direct human interaction³. They essentially behave as wild animals⁴.

Feral cats are protected under the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011. This means killing or causing unnecessary suffering to feral cats is illegal. Though unowned, feral cats should not be treated as pests.

Cats Protection has created the Feral Guide to help promote the welfare needs of the unowned cat population: cats.org.uk/feral-cat

Why it matters

Feral cats are sometimes wrongly treated as pests, leading to illegal culling or inappropriate pest control responses. Cats Protection recommends the most effective and humane method of managing feral cats is to carry out trap, neuter, vaccinate and return (TNVR) programmes.

There is a lack of clarity around who is responsible for feral cats. Councils often do not respond to feral cat issues, PSNI handle wildlife crime and animal-related criminal activity and DAERA's remit is limited to farmed animals. This creates enforcement gaps.

What needs to change?

To end cruelty to cats, Cats Protection is calling for the Northern Ireland Executive to:

- clarify enforcement responsibilities between DAERA, councils, and PSNI to ensure feral cats are not excluded from welfare protections

³ Cats Protection Feral Guide

⁴ Ibid

- promote public understanding that feral cats are not pests and should not be culled
- support community education on humane management of feral cats, including TNVR and responsible feeding practices



Case study: Supporting a farmer to safely relocate a feral cat colony

When a sheep farmer in rural Moneymore grew concerned about the potential risk of toxoplasmosis to his pregnant ewes, he reached out for help with a small colony of feral cats living in his workshop. Although he had formed a bond with the cats, he was keen to ensure both their welfare and the safety of his livestock.

Cats Protection provided training, traps, and equipment, empowering the farmer to lead the humane trapping process. With ongoing support, all cats were safely trapped, neutered, and rehomed together to a new environment. The collaboration ensured the cats' welfare was protected, the farmer's concerns were addressed and the colony remained intact.

The farmer said "Cats Protection guidance was invaluable. The recorded demonstration and the support on the phone made me feel confident enough to manage the task on my own. I couldn't have done it without them."

Protect cats in the digital world

Many parts of our lives exist in the digital world, and it's no surprise that cats have become a part of this. The internet is full of cats; cat videos, cat jokes, cat photos, cat advice and cats for sale. Sadly, the regulation isn't yet where it needs to be. Cats are being harmed due to a lack of action by social media companies and other websites. These sites allow 'trends' where people are harming their cats. They also allow kittens who are too young and ill to be sold on their platforms. Cats Protection is calling for action to protect cats in the digital world.

- **Tighten up rules on selling cats online** to make sure cats and buyers are protected
- **Encourage advertisers and the media to show cats responsibly**
- **Encourage social media companies to take harmful content seriously.** We're calling for content containing animal abuse to be removed swiftly

1. Tighten rules on selling cats online

The issue

Cats are increasingly bought and sold online, leaving the public susceptible to unscrupulous individuals putting profit before welfare.

Why it matters

67% of cats purchased in the last 12 months were found online⁵.

When finding a pet to buy, potential owners are looking for a family member. From a cute cat photo they become emotionally invested before they've even messaged the seller, which places buyers in a vulnerable position.

In some cases, this might be through direct fraud such as posting photos of a cat that doesn't exist and demanding a deposit.

Other times animal welfare is compromised too, with buyers deceived into buying sick or underage kittens. This is called mis-selling.

Action Fraud reported more than 14,000 crime reports relating to pet fraud between 2019 and 2025, amounting to over £7 million being lost in pet scams.

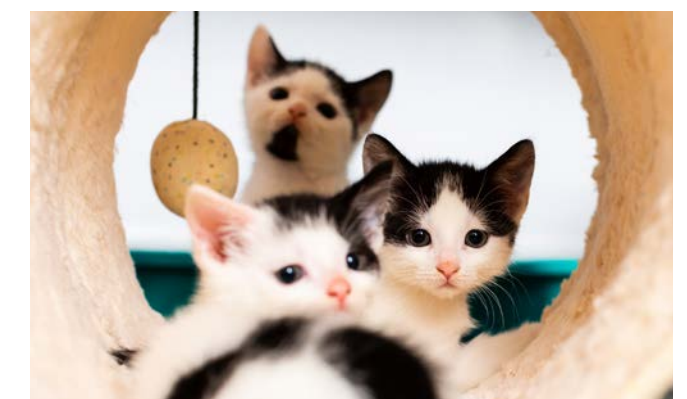
In 2001, to tackle this problem and improve the welfare of pets being bought and sold, the Pet Advertising Advisory Group (PAAG), of which Cats Protection is a member, was established. PAAG sets out advertising guidelines to improve standards, which some of the top classified websites sign up to.

Not all websites sign up to PAAG's guidelines, nor do social media companies, which have become a significant part of the pet trade. Despite social media companies having their own rules limiting pet sales, 17% of purchased cats in the UK were found via Facebook⁶.

What needs to change?

To protect cats in the digital world, Cats Protection is calling for:

- social media companies to close loopholes that allow pet sales from both private individuals and businesses on their platforms
- PAAG's Advertising Standards to be implemented in law to improve the standard of all pet adverts
- the Northern Ireland Executive to continue to highlight the steps that need to be taken when buying a pet online
- the Northern Ireland Executive and local authorities to raise awareness of the need for a licence to sell pets, work to make potential pet buyers more aware of these requirements and review the effectiveness of the regulations governing pet sales



^{5, 6} Cats Protection Cats and Their Stats (Cats) Northern Ireland Report 2025

2. Call on advertisers and the media to show cats responsibly

The issue

The advertising and media industries commonly use cats in their content. If pets are represented irresponsibly, this can lead to the popularisation of breeds with known health conditions or the promotion of behaviour that is harmful to cats.

Why it matters

Animals evoke an emotive response and draw attention to content in a crowded marketplace.

But advertisers and media producers should not be risking animal welfare for the sake of 'clicks' or increased 'conversions'.

Some of the common issues include the use of cats with extreme characteristics, perhaps seen as distinctive by advertisers and film makers but which unfortunately suffer significant health and welfare issues. Cats have also been dressed up in clothing or accessories for adverts, something that can restrict a cat's movement and cause stress. They have been depicted in situations that cause stress for cats, reinforcing a misunderstanding of their needs and impeding attempts to raise public awareness around the recognition of stress and negative welfare.

Those using animals in media are hugely influential, it's vital they take responsibility for their actions and don't normalise poor cat welfare.

Cats Protection has created guidelines for advertisers using cats. Scan the QR code:



Or go to:
cats.org.uk/advertising-advice

What needs to change?

To protect cats in the digital world, Cats Protection is calling for:

- the Advertising Standards Agency to review its guidance and strengthen its position on the promotion of poor welfare or cats with characteristics of concern
- advertisers, film and other content makers using animals to review their own internal standards and work with welfare charities to implement policies to avoid normalising poor welfare or promoting physical characteristics of concern



3. Encourage social media companies to take harmful cat content seriously

The issue

Social media promotes content that depicts cats in distress, from content people think of as 'fun', to outright abuse.

Why it matters

83% of cat owners in Northern Ireland say that they look at funny or cute pictures or videos of cats online at least once a month⁷.

While the internet can be a fantastic source to find information on cat welfare and behaviour, there is also a large amount of cat content that people consider to be 'fun' but is actually causing distress to cats. Trends around this type of content can rise quickly with users challenging each other to involve their cats and share videos.

Even more concerning, is the existence of outright cat abuse online. Cases have been reported of livestreams showing cats being tortured and killed. This not only has tragic consequences for cats, but any person unfortunate enough to come across this content may be left with long-lasting trauma.

Cats Protection is a member of Social Media Animal Cruelty Coalition (SMACC). We discourage anyone from watching or sharing cruelty content; instead, we advise them to report it.

What needs to change?

To protect cats in the digital world, Cats Protection is calling on social media companies to:

- swiftly remove any content containing animal abuse and alert any relevant authorities



"The internet is full of sweet and funny cat videos. Sadly, there can be a dark side to online cat content. Some viral 'trends' can depict cat owners unknowingly causing their cats harm or distress. We've seen content which contains misinformation about cats, which could lead to poor welfare. At the more extreme end, videos containing cat abuse have appeared on multiple social media platforms. Cats Protection is a member of Social Media Animal Cruelty Coalition (SMACC) to help combat this content. SMACC is a coalition designed to end the proliferation of animal cruelty content on social media by collaborating with the platforms to end the availability, spread and profitability of this content.

"If you come across any cat cruelty content online, make sure to follow SMACC's 'five steps to stop online cruelty': be aware of what is cruel, do not watch, do not engage, do not share and report to the platform."

Jade Emery-Temprano,
Campaigns & Advocacy Officer

Recognise cats as family

Most cat owners see their cats as part of their family. Cats provide important companionship and support for many people. Becoming separated from their cat when, for example, the cat is lost or must be given up due to lack of pet-friendly housing, can be devastating. Cats Protection is calling for a recognition of the importance of cats to their families. We support laws which keep cats and their owners together.

- **Introduce compulsory microchipping of pet cats and create a single point of search for microchip databases** to help reunite cats with their families and make the process of looking up details easier
- **Encourage pet-friendly rented housing** and reduce this barrier to pet ownership
- **Include animal welfare on the national curriculum** to help prevent the mistreatment of animals
- **Acknowledge the benefits of cats to people's wellbeing** through further research on loneliness and other social issues
- **Raise awareness of the welfare issues of cat hoarding and multi-cat households** to improve the welfare of both cats and people



1. Introduce compulsory cat microchipping with a single searchable database

The issue

Cats Protection believes that all owned cats must be microchipped to give them the best chance of being identified and returned to their owner.

Why it matters

The best way to reunite lost, stolen or abandoned cats with their owners is through microchip details. If the cat is found injured and taken to a vet, those details will enable a vet to contact the owners. In the sad case where a cat is found dead, having up-to-date microchip details will at least enable the owner to get closure.

Stray cats without a microchip consistently remains one of the top reasons cats come into our care. We encourage owners to microchip their cats and keep their details up to date. This stops cats from being needlessly rehomed and frees up pens for the cats that need them the most.

It can be difficult for approved authorities to locate a cat's owner, as there are numerous government-approved microchipping databases operating, along with some bogus sites. The process of looking up an owner's details should be as easy as possible, while also protecting individuals' personal data.

Cats Protection has created a scanning best practice guide (bit.ly/scanningbestpracticeguide) for local authorities on how to scan cats who are road traffic victims for microchips and help give closure to owners.

What needs to change?

To recognise cats are family, Cats Protection is calling on the Northern Ireland Executive to:

- introduce compulsory microchipping of pet cats over 20 weeks old
- work with other UK governments to create a single point of search for relevant authorities scanning microchips. This would make the checking of a chip as swift and efficient as possible
- encourage councils to scan dead cats they find on the road to help owners find out what has happened to their lost pet



2. Encourage pet-friendly rented housing

The issue

In Northern Ireland, having a pet can be a privilege reserved for those who own their own homes. Cats Protection believes that renting your home shouldn't be a barrier to cat ownership.

Why it matters

For many people cats are more than just pets, they are family. Tenants are being denied the companionship and joy of having a cat simply because their tenancy does not allow pets. It can be heartbreaking when someone must choose between their beloved pet and a home.

With **35% of cat owners in Northern Ireland living in rented accommodation**⁸, this affects thousands of families and their pets.

A 2021 YouGov survey⁹ of landlords found that damage to the property is the main reason for not allowing pets, yet 73% of UK landlords who have allowed pets reported no problems.

What needs to change?

To recognise cats are family, Cats Protection is calling on the Northern Ireland Executive to:

- provide tenants with a right to request a pet, which cannot be refused unreasonably
- work with the rental sector to break down stigmas around renting to tenants with pets and encourage more landlords to allow tenants to keep pets

⁸ Cats Protection Cats and Their Stats (Cats) Northern Ireland Report 2025

⁹ A 2021 survey of landlords, letting agents and tenants on pets and rental properties, conducted by YouGov on behalf of Cats Protection and Dogs Trust

How you can help

You can find out more about our Rent with Cats campaign and help change the way we look at cat ownership in rented accommodation.

Scan the QR code:



Or go to:
bit.ly/rentwithcatscampaign



3. Include animal welfare in the curriculum

The issue

Children are the pet owners of the future and it is essential they leave school with a basic understanding of how to respect and care for animals.

Why it matters

Educating children about how to look after pets would also benefit a child’s emotional development; enabling greater discussion and understanding about caring for others, empathy and responsibility.

Helping children understand how to care responsibly for pets will also help to reduce acts of animal cruelty and abandonment in the future.

Research on the effectiveness of animal welfare programmes shows wide-ranging benefits to the personal development of young people, including:

- increasing animal welfare knowledge
- improving attitudes towards animals
- improving pro-social behaviours and empathy
- in children as young as three, discussing animals enabled them to develop their capacity for empathy, increasing their ability to relate the needs of animals to the needs of people
- in older children (nine to 11 years), teachers reported a significant increase in pro-social behaviours such as friendliness and showing empathy and compassion for the feelings of others

What needs to change?

To recognise cats are family, Cats Protection is calling on the Northern Ireland Executive to:

- include animal welfare education in the curriculum for all children
- commission research into the links between animal welfare education and preventing problems of animal cruelty and neglect, and reducing the incidence of anti-social behaviour in adults
- consult with animal welfare charities including Cats Protection on how to include issues relating to responsible pet welfare within the curriculum

Cats Protection provides talks to children in schools, youth organisations and community groups to help them learn how to care for cats. Our dedicated website at cats.org.uk/education is packed full of resources for teachers and fun, educational activities for children.

“I find it very valuable being a part of children’s education and teaching them specifically about taking care of cats. Through the Cats Protection education programme, children also learn about the five welfare needs of cats in fun, interactive ways. I hope that many children will go home, remember, apply and talk about some of the things they’ve learned in the sessions about cat behaviour and how to treat them. Anything they learn at a young age about taking care of cats, or any animal, can have a lifelong effect, helping them to appreciate pets and other wildlife, and form meaningful relationships with animals and people alike.”

Vanessa, Cats Protection volunteer

4. Acknowledge the benefits of cats to people’s wellbeing

The issue

Cats are sentient creatures and it is important to consider their welfare alongside that of their owner. However, it is clear that the cat-owner bond can be of great benefit to both.

Cat ownership or interaction can be part of a range of interventions in society which can tackle feelings of isolation.

Cats Protection believes that cats can provide hugely valuable companionship and the wide-ranging benefits of this to their owners must be recognised in all relevant policy decisions.

Why it matters

There are around 250,000 owned cats in Northern Ireland, with one in five households (22%) owning a cat¹⁰. The bond between cat and owner can have huge benefits to mental health and in combatting loneliness.

The CATS Northern Ireland Report 2025 has found that the wellbeing benefits of cat ownership are the main driving force behind having a cat, with companionship, reducing loneliness and reducing stress being collectively the top reasons that people choose to own a cat (55%).

There is a wide-ranging body of research highlighting the benefits of cats to people’s wellbeing. Indeed, the Mental Health Foundation highlight how a pet can be a great source of comfort and motivation. Additionally, the Children’s Society highlights that pets are known to help reduce anxiety by offering companionship to their owners, particularly for young people.

What needs to change?

To recognise cats as family, Cats Protection is calling on the Northern Ireland Executive to:

- commission further research on how pet ownership can help combat loneliness so that the benefits of pets can be properly understood
- encourage health and social care workers to consider the role of pets in social prescribing. This can include volunteering with an animal welfare charity
- work closely with animal welfare charities to encourage more care homes and retirement complexes to allow new residents to have cats



¹⁰ Cats Protection Cats and Their Stats (Cats) Northern Ireland 2025 Report

5. Raise awareness of the welfare issues of cat hoarding and multi-cat households

The issue

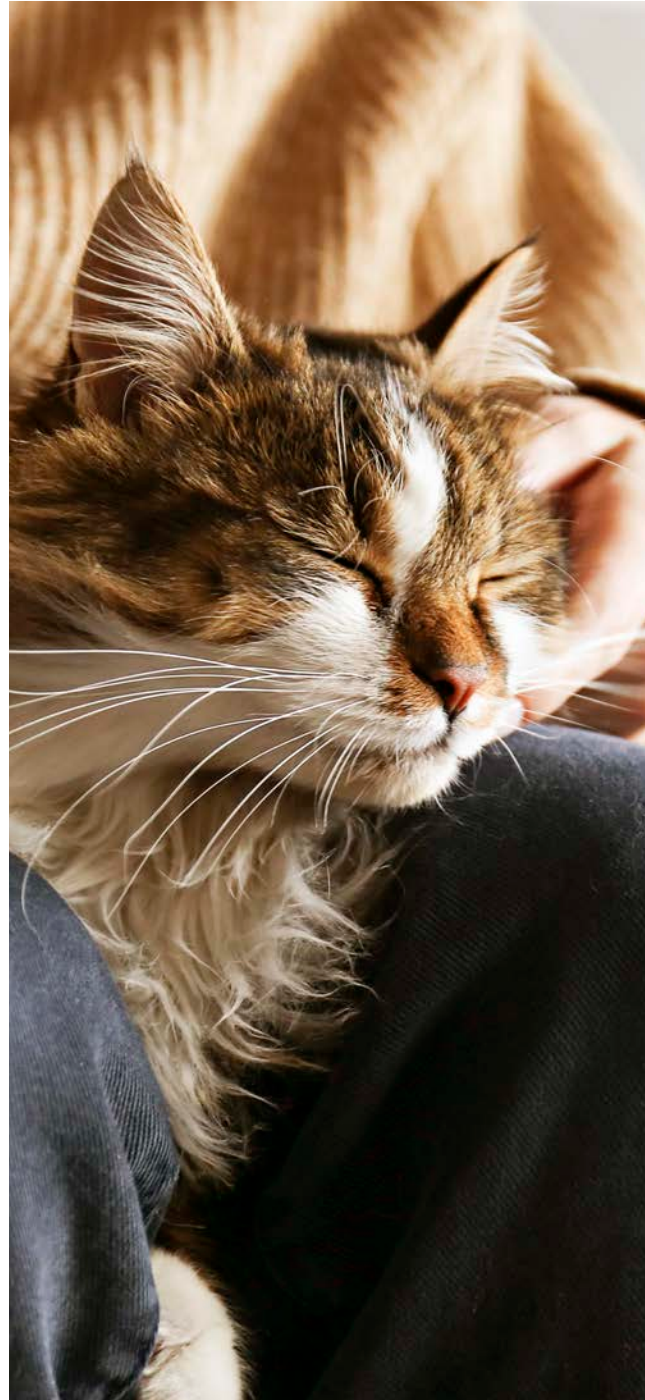
An animal hoarder is an individual who has accumulated a large number of animals that they are unable to properly care for. Animals may lack proper food, shelter, veterinary care and clean environments. Incidents of animal hoarding can lead to risks to both the animals and the hoarder.

Hoarding affects an estimated 2 to 5% of the UK population, with Animal Hoarding Disorder/ Noah's Syndrome being recognised as a distinct subset of hoarding disorder¹¹.

Why it matters

There are many complex reasons why someone might begin hoarding cats, which can include collecting animals after a traumatic event or loss, or when a kind-hearted person 'rescues' too many animals from life on the street. On average, the number of animals kept by hoarders is around 44 to 64 per case¹². Sadly, whatever the motivation, cat hoarding presents cat and human welfare problems.

Cat hoarding is often complex and must be dealt with compassionately. Many may feel embarrassed to seek help for fear of judgement or reprisal. Because animal hoarding is considered a mental health disorder, individuals often fail to provide adequate food, water, sanitation and veterinary care for the animals in their care. They may also be in denial about their inability to meet these basic needs, which can further complicate intervention efforts.



¹¹ The Institute for Research and Innovation in Social Services (Iriss) Effects of Clutter or Hoarding on people affected by it and Nadal Z, Ferrari M, Lora J, Revollo A, Nicolas F, Astegiano S, et al. Noah's Syndrome: Systematic Review of Animal Hoarding Disorder

¹² Wilkinson J, Schoultz M, King HM, Neave N, Bailey C. Animal hoarding cases in England: Implications for public health services. Front Public Health and Nadal Z, Ferrari M, Lora J, Revollo A, Nicolas F, Astegiano S, et al. Noah's Syndrome: Systematic Review of Animal Hoarding Disorder

Cat hoarding causes a range of health and welfare implications for both cats and humans, including:

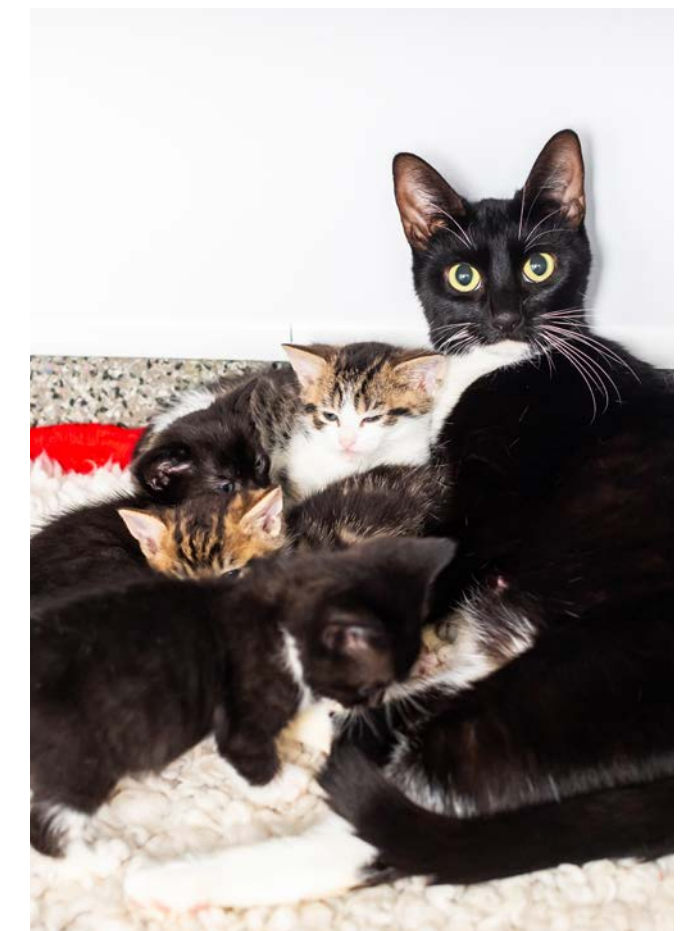
- **starvation and dehydration** due to insufficient food and water. A lack of resources can also lead to poor nutrition and ill health in cats, such as dental disease
- **overcrowding and poor sanitation**, which result in the spread of infectious diseases and parasites such as cat flu and ringworm
- **inter-cat aggression and stress-related behaviours** such as urine spraying, inappropriate urination/defecation, and fighting, often caused by social overcrowding and competition for limited resources
- **repeated pregnancies in female cats**, adding to the number of cats and adding further strain on resources
- **genetic diseases from inter-breeding**, which may result in congenital defects and poor health
- **confinement and lack of socialisation**, and constant stress of living in poor conditions, causes psychological distress and adds to a reduced quality of life. Animals may develop long-term behavioural problems such as fearfulness, aggression or anxiety
- **high prevalence of fleas, worms and other parasites**, which can affect both animals and humans
- **environmental health hazards**, such as excessive urine and faeces, strong odours, and contamination of living spaces
- **public health risks**, unsanitary conditions and close proximity between animals and humans increases the risk of zoonotic disease transfer

Sadly, dead animals are often mixed in with ill and healthier animals. A 2022 study found 53% of animal hoarding cases involve dead animals or animals requiring euthanasia, and there are dead animals in 32.9% of cases¹³.

What needs to change?

To recognise cats as family, Cats Protection is calling on the Northern Ireland Executive to:

- raise awareness with the public about the welfare issues of cat hoarding and its consequences
- identify or create a service responsible for monitoring and responding to incidents of animal hoarding. This would create a robust system of reporting and could create a better-funded system to support intervention efforts
- fund research to better understand animal hoarding as a mental health condition and what interventions work to prevent future hoarding
- provide education to the Housing Executive, councils and mental health professionals about cat hoarding and how to spot the warning signs and offer support and work to stop future hoarding



¹³ Wilkinson J, Schoultz M, King HM, Neave N, Bailey C. Animal hoarding cases in England: Implications for public health services. Front Public Health

Keep cats safe and secure



Cats are sometimes put in danger by parts of life that we may not realise impact them. They can accidentally be harmed by things many find delightful like fireworks displays and certain flowers. Cats can also become unintended victims of traps such as snares. Cats Protection is calling for action to keep cats safe and secure.

- **Retailers to improve the labelling of products toxic to cats, such as lilies** to help prevent accidental poisonings
- **Ban the sale and use of snares and glue traps** as they cause suffering and pain
- **Restrict the use of fireworks** to prevent the distress they can cause to humans and animals

1. Promote better labelling of toxic products like lilies

The issue

Lilies are extremely toxic to cats.

56% of cat owners are unaware of the danger that bringing lilies into their home will pose to their much-loved cat¹⁴.

Why it matters

All parts of the lily are toxic to cats if ingested, from the pollen, leaves and stem to the water in the vase where the lilies have stood. The most common route of poisoning is caused by cats getting pollen on their fur and consuming this pollen when grooming. Pollen-free lilies have been marketed as 'cat-safe', but this is not the case, the rest of the plant is still just as deadly if consumed. All plants in the Liliaceae (true lily) family are potentially lethal for cats, causing kidney damage which, if left untreated, can lead to kidney failure and death.

The early signs of poisoning can be difficult to spot, and so cats with lily poisoning often do not get the urgent and life-saving treatment they need. Unfortunately, all too often bouquets containing lilies, and lily plants, do not contain a warning or, where they do, it is buried on the back of the label.

Many online flower retailers do not include warnings next to images of bouquets including lilies and some even list lilies without pollen as 'pet-friendly'.

What needs to change?

To keep cats safe and secure, Cats Protection is calling on retailers to:

- ensure all bouquets containing lilies have clear labels which warn consumers of the risk to pets. The warning should be obvious and not easily removable (for example, not on the price tag) to ensure that those receiving the flowers as a gift are aware of the danger to cats
- ensure the listing of lilies online includes a clear note, reiterated at checkout, to warn a customer if a bouquet contains lilies so that they are aware of the risks



Case study: Nova

Eighteen-month-old cat Nova tragically died after she brushed against a lily plant at home and groomed the pollen from her fur. Her owner had bought the plant to bring some joy during the festive period, but she was sadly not aware of the dangers of lilies to cats.

2. Ban the sale and use of snares and glue traps

The issue

Free-running snares can legally be used in Northern Ireland to manage target species to protect game birds and prevent animals from causing damage. Snares are targeted at foxes and rabbits. However, snares are unable to discriminate between species, and many other animals are often the victims, including cats.

Glue traps are intended for rodent control but due to their indiscriminate nature, sadly, many other animals like cats can become trapped in them. This can cause horrific injuries and sometimes lead to the animal having to be put to sleep.

Why it matters

Snares cause pain and suffering and, where the animal is not released, eventual slow and painful death. Regardless of whether they capture target or non-target animals, snares are outdated and inhumane.

Northern Ireland is behind Wales, Scotland and most of Europe who have already banned snares. The rest of the UK has also recognised the cruelty of glue traps by banning their use.

What needs to change?

To recognise cats are family, Cats Protection is calling on the Northern Ireland Executive to:

- introduce a total ban on the sale and use of all snares and glue traps.



3. Restrict the use of fireworks

The issue

Most cat owners know that pets can become very alarmed and distressed by fireworks.

71% of cat owners say that their cat has been affected by fireworks¹⁵.

Why it matters

Cats associate sudden loud noises and flashes of light with danger and an imminent threat to their physical safety, so their natural response is to vacate the area quickly. However, because it is impossible for them to understand the source of the noise, they will often bolt in an unfavourable direction, which may well lead them to become lost or injured (for example, by running into traffic).

Even when kept indoors during periods when fireworks are in use, cats often feel stressed and anxious due to the noise itself and its unpredictable nature.

What needs to change?

To keep cats safe and secure, Cats Protection is calling on the Northern Ireland Executive to:

- restrict the use and sale of fireworks to licensed, organised public events at specific times of the year such as New Year, Diwali, reducing the unpredictability of displays and allowing owners to prepare their pets
- require local authorities to consider the proximity of animal welfare establishments such as rehoming centres, farms, rescues, when licensing public displays, and ensure events are well-publicised in advance so pet owners can take precautions
- reduce the maximum permitted noise level of fireworks in order to help ease the stress to cats, other animals and indeed many humans



**Making a better life for cats,
because life is better with cats.**





To find out more please visit: [**cats.org.uk/manifesto-ni**](https://cats.org.uk/manifesto-ni)

Find your local Cats Protection: [**cats.org.uk/find-us**](https://cats.org.uk/find-us)

For any further information please email: [**advocacy@cats.org.uk**](mailto:advocacy@cats.org.uk)