

Speaking up for

2016 was another very busy year for Advocacy with many opportunities to speak up for cats. **Jacqui Cuff**, Cats Protection's Advocacy Manager, looks back at some of the year's campaign highlights

If I had to summarise last year I'd say it was the 'year of the kittens' as our major campaign tackled the issue of poor welfare where kittens are bred and sold commercially. The 'True Cost of Kittens' campaign received tremendous support from almost 50,000 supporters and thousands of readers of this magazine returned campaign postcards to us. We also focused on launching country manifestos for cats as well as on issues such as licensing of air guns, microchipping of cats and the inadequacies of sentences for animal welfare offences.

Launching country manifestos for cats

2016 got underway with the preparation and launch of three country manifestos for cats in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland in March ahead of the devolved elections in May 2016. Animal welfare is a devolved issue which means that legislation governing cat welfare is largely the responsibility of Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs), Assembly Members in Wales (AMs) and Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly (MLAs). Each country manifesto was tailored to reflect country priorities based on concerns raised by our branches and supporters. We held events in the Welsh Assembly and Scottish Parliaments and an online launch in Northern Ireland. Our receptions were attended by the relevant Welsh and Scottish Ministers as well as by many elected members with whom we are now in contact.



Photo: Philippa Gedge Photography

Jacqui Cuff, Advocacy Manager and Peter Hepburn, Chief Executive gave evidence to an MP enquiry into pet welfare in May 2016 – pictured left to right alongside colleagues from International Cat Care

Giving evidence to an MP enquiry into pet welfare

It is not often that a select committee of MPs focusses its attentions on pet welfare so we were delighted to submit written evidence on cat welfare issues to the EFRA (Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) Sub-Committee and even more so when we were asked to appear and give oral evidence. MPs were keen to understand the welfare issues facing owned and abandoned cats and the session was recorded and appeared on BBC Parliament. When the Committee published its report in the Autumn we were delighted that within it many of the recommendations to Government took up suggestions made by Cats Protection. Key Committee recommendations include the regulation of cat breeding and sale, mandatory minimum standards for online advertising and the inclusion of animal welfare in the national curriculum.

The True Cost of Kittens campaign

Last year the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) launched a long awaited review of the licensing of animal establishments. This was an opportunity to bring outdated legislation on pet sales dating back to 1951 up to date. In the autumn, in order to maximise this unique opportunity, we launched our biggest public facing advocacy campaign to date – the True Cost of Kittens – calling for the prohibition on sales of kittens under eight weeks; closure of legal loopholes that allow repeat commercial breeding and a clear definition of commercial pet sales.

We wanted large scale support so we wrote to over 4,000 vets and promoted the campaign on our national website, Twitter, Facebook and in *The Cat* magazine. The response has been amazing. Just over 40,000 campaign e-letters were sent to MPs and over 7,000 postcards were returned to us for



Photo: Claire Bruce, ClearlyPR

We were delighted that the former Deputy Minister for Farming and Food spoke at the launch of our Manifesto for Cats at the Welsh Assembly and that 17 Members of the Assembly attended in support

cats in 2016

submission to the Government Minister. Our campaign video was viewed over 200,000 times. We want to thank everyone who supported the campaign. We have had encouraging feedback from Government, particularly on banning sales of kittens under eight weeks of age. We will update you as soon as we have the Government's new regulations.

Cats at Westminster at Christmas

Forty two MPs and three members of the Lords attended our 2016 Christmas parliamentary reception, which will now be an annual event. This is a wonderful opportunity for the Advocacy team to build relationships with existing supportive members of parliament as well as develop new supporters. We also invite our friends and colleagues in other charities, veterinary groups and professional organisations. Collaboration is so important and often we find that cooperation and consensus really helps achieve success, particularly with Government.

And into 2017...

This year is already looking busy. Spring should see the triggering of the Brexit process and in February, working as part of the Eurogroup for Animals and with the RSPCA, World Horse Welfare and others we will host a reception in the Lords to highlight the need for animal welfare to be safeguarded as part of the Brexit negotiations. With the arrival last November of Richard Clare, Advocacy Officer we plan to do more campaigning at a local level, particularly on issues linked to cats and housing providers. We will be continuing our work on issues linked to kitten sales and plan to take the True Cost of Kittens campaign to Scotland.

However, a day is a long time in politics so no doubt 2017 will bring unexpected opportunities for us to speak up for cats! ●



Members of the Advocacy team at our Christmas 2017 Westminster reception pictured here with colleagues from Blue Cross, Battersea Dogs & Cats Home and Dogs Trust



Taking our giant Christmas Kitten into Parliament last December

For more information visit

www.cats.org.uk/speakingupforcats

www.cats.org.uk/manifesto

Email: advocacy@cats.org.uk

