



28 October 2021

Julie James MS  
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Dear Minister,

I wanted to write to thank you for meeting with me recently, in what was a really useful and constructive discussion about issues in your portfolio pertaining to animal welfare. The RSPCA values its close working relationship with the Welsh Government, and hugely valued the opportunity to meet with you in your new role.

#### **Consolidation of wildlife law**

Matters related to wildlife will undoubtedly be one of the issues we hope to discuss with you and your officials more frequently in the coming years. The RSPCA is realistic that the post-Brexit and pandemic landscape make legislative availability even more scarce; though we hope a Wildlife Act - consolidating and updating Wales' wildlife law, and enhancing public understanding of their responsibilities - will be a long-term objective in Wales.

Nevertheless, it was hugely positive to hear the scope to address some wildlife matters as part of a future legislative focus on 'environmental governance' - and, whether as part of an Agriculture (Wales) Bill led by your cabinet colleague, or elsewhere - the RSPCA is very excited by the prospect of snares and glue traps being banned in Wales.

#### **GM / Gene Editing**

It was very positive to hear that the Welsh Government shares many of the RSPCA's concerns around GM, and that these have been raised at the Interministerial Group (IMG). While it is positive that the UK Government has not yet announced plans to permit gene-edited livestock following their recent consultation, RSPCA Cymru hopes the Welsh Government will act as a strong voice against the practice; and - should rules be further eased in England in the future - consider what steps can be taken to stop unlabelled GE food from appearing on Wales' shelves, given the challenges posed by the Internal Market Act.

Patron HM The Queen

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### **Flood protection**

Thank you for your kind words about the role of RSPCA Cymru's frontline officers in the flood response effort. I am immensely proud of the work they do keeping animals safe during flooding - and it would be fantastic to have an operational RSPCA presence at the Flood Protection Group you mentioned during our meeting. We would also hugely welcome the opportunity to input into the review you mentioned into the roles of different agencies; as clarification and mutual understanding of roles and responsibilities is so beneficial.

As discussed, part of the RSPCA's new strategy is securing statutory powers for our frontline officers. Flooding is another example of where this could be of benefit - as it could further relieve pressure on other frontline agencies where access is needed to stranded animals.

The Welsh Government previously tasked the RSPCA with exploring the feasibility of statutory powers for our frontline officers, and a detailed report was submitted to your cabinet colleague, the now Minister for Rural Affairs and North Wales, and Trefnydd, at the end of 2019. I am pleased to enclose a copy of this report, and we hope to resume positive discussions on this possibility with the Welsh Government in the near future. Any support you could give us with this would be very much appreciated.

### **Planning & Housing**

Again, the RSPCA is realistic as to the scale of planning law in Wales and the scope for legislative change; and while we continue to hope that animal welfare will ultimately become a material consideration in the process, any steps towards ensuring it is at least a greater consideration for planning leads would be a hugely welcome step. Indeed, we discussed the possibility of animal welfare guidance on the minimum design for the likes of catteries, dog kennels and other establishments. I mentioned advice, backed by the RSPCA, from the [Association of Dogs and Cats Homes](#) - and we would hugely value any opportunities to work with you to cascade this guidance to local authority planning leads.

It was also reassuring to hear you outline the interpretation of the Renting Homes Act 2016 and that landlords should, based on this legislation, not routinely prevent the responsible keeping of pets. As you will be aware, the RSPCA has been calling for model tenancy agreements making explicit reference to pets - but we will explore the provisions in the Renting Homes Act 2016 as part of our work with landlords and others in the housing sector.

### **Fireworks**

We were aware from your recent correspondence with the Senedd's Petitions Committee that matters related to fireworks will sit within your portfolio, and it was great to briefly discuss these issues too. As we approach Bonfire Night, RSPCA Cymru has concerns that a rise in unofficial displays - amid ongoing hesitancy to hold larger events - could have animal welfare consequences; and we are doing what we can to raise awareness and ensure animal owners are prepared; and hope to move to a situation in the future where the hosting of display are more predictable and only on or around traditional dates over the year.

We would value in the coming weeks any opportunity to work with the Welsh Government's communications teams to help promote these messages on social media. Our public affairs team will also be meeting with Senedd Members and Councillors in the coming weeks to help spread these awareness-raising messages to their constituents - and to support their handling of relevant casework enquiries.

Further to our discussion, we would also be happy to write to the UK Government about the transfer of regulatory powers on fireworks as, while constitutional matters are not normally something involve ourselves in, this would be consistent with the devolution of animal welfare and, hopefully, pave the way for action which could act as a blueprint for other nations in the UK.

I appreciate your ongoing support for animal welfare and the work of the RSPCA pertaining to your portfolio, and look forward to working with you and your officials in the years ahead

Yours sincerely,



Chris Sherwood  
**Chief Executive**