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Deputy Minister for Housing and Local Government



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Ein cyf/Our ref MA/LG/6033/19

Kelly Tolhurst MP
Minister for Small Business, Consumers and Corporate Responsibility
Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy
minister.tolhurst@beis.gov.uk

14 January 2020

Dear Kelly

As Ministers with policy responsibility for animal welfare, air quality, noise and veterans' issues in Wales, we urge the UK Government to provide a detailed and positive response to the recommendations of the House of Commons Petitions Committee inquiry into fireworks, published on 5 November 2019.

Without prejudging the outcome of such work, we urge you to accept the Committee's recommendation for the UK Government to lead a review, working with animal welfare experts and the fireworks industry, of the effects of fireworks noise on animal welfare, with a view to setting a workable reduced maximum decibel limit which would diminish the risks to animal health. We would welcome the opportunity for Welsh Government officials to be involved in and contribute to the terms of reference for such a review, ensuring it addresses serious issues around the effects of fireworks on animals which have arisen here in Wales.

We strongly support the Committee's recommendation for the UK Government to fund and coordinate a major awareness campaign on the responsible use of fireworks. The campaign should encourage people who use fireworks to let their neighbours know in advance, so they can take steps to protect themselves and their animals if they need to. The campaign should include explicit information in relation to the potential impacts of fireworks on vulnerable groups such as autistic people, veterans and those with PTSD and other health conditions, as well as on domestic and working animals. Our officials would be pleased to work with yours to ensure any specific requirements for Wales are met.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

We are open-minded regarding the provision of additional powers to assist Local Authorities in managing issues surrounding fireworks. The Committee has recommended piloting a revenue-neutral, mandatory permit system for firework displays at a local level. Local Authority officers in Wales have raised both pros and cons of such an approach with our officials. The prior notification of displays is helpful for informing local residents and ensuring health and safety, and works well on a voluntary basis in some authorities. However, there are concerns a permit system might deter some organisers from mounting public firework displays, potentially leading to an increase in less well run private displays. Some Welsh Local Authority officers have suggested the Licensing Act 2003 should be looked at as a possible vehicle for regulating large firework displays. The Welsh Government would welcome dialogue with the UK Government on the various approaches to reviewing Local Authority powers in this area, with a focus on the practicalities, likely positive outcomes and potential unintended consequences.

We agree the level of concern about fireworks is likely to be under-reported by those affected, and people should be enabled and encouraged to make their concerns known. Our officials should work together, perhaps on guidance to improve the systems public authorities have in place for reporting concerns around the misuse of fireworks and establish a consistent approach to data collection and publication.

We support the Committee's recommendation for the UK Government to conduct a review of online sales of fireworks, with a particular focus on sales via social media, and take measures to exert pressure on social media companies to identify and remove posts advertising unlicensed or illegal fireworks for sale on their platforms. We urge the UK Government to ensure fireworks intended for storage at home are not packaged and designed in a way which appeals to children.

On 10 December, we launched a 13-week public consultation on a Clean Air Plan for Wales: Healthy Air, Healthy Wales. It states we will assess the contribution domestic bonfires and fireworks make to levels of fine particulate matter, and we are taking a cross-Government approach to consider what, if any, further action should be taken in this area. Welsh Government air quality officials would welcome a discussion with officials in the Office for Product Safety and Standards in relation to the air quality impacts of fireworks, including consideration of the range of chemicals which may be present.

We would be grateful if you would take account of the views of Welsh Ministers in formulating your response to the Petitions Committee, and engage with us as work is taken forward. This matter cuts across a number of devolved policy areas, and we should work collaboratively to secure improvements to health and well-being of people and animals.

This letter is being copied for information to Ash Denham MSP, Minister for Community Safety in the Scottish Government, and to the Secretary of State for Wales.

Regards


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