

Cross Party Group for Animal Welfare Minutes

14 July 2025 – Online Meeting (Zoom)

Attendance

Carolyn Thomas MS (Chair)	Member of the Senedd
Buffy Williams MS	Member of the Senedd
Mike Hedges MS	Member of the Senedd
Jamie Adair (Secretariat)	League Against Cruel Sports
Anne-Louise Davies	Welsh Local Government Association
Arnja Dale	SPCA New Zealand
Chris Ward	Cats Protection
Dan Rose	Staff of Carolyn Thomas MS
Deborah Davies	Independent
Dewi John	Dogs Trust
Ed Hayes	Kennel Club
Fiona Pereira	Animal Aid
Gareth Walters	Welsh Local Government Association
Holly Conway	Kennel Club
Iain Green	Animal Aid
Kirsty Rees	Senedd Support Staff Member
Liam McGuinness	Senedd Support Staff
Lynne Oldham (on behalf of Chris Topping)	Justice for Reggie
Michelle Masterton-Smith	Animal Aid
Nicky Hughes	Greyhound Rescue Wales
Nigel Palmer	Badger Trust
Alison Vaughan	SPCA New Zealand
Russell Whiting	Crustacean Compassion
Tomos Roberts-Young	Senedd Support Staff Member
Vanessa Waddon	Hope Rescue

Minutes

Item	Actions
<p>1. Welcome/Introductions</p> <p>Carolyn Thomas MS welcomed the group back following what has been a lengthy hiatus since the last meeting.</p> <p>She highlighted the positive announcement by Welsh Government that greyhound racing will come to an end in Wales - a significant and very welcome step forward for animal welfare.</p> <p>Apologies were received from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Natalie Harvey, Naturewatch Foundation Malcolm Eames, Greyhound Rescue Wales 	

<p>The Chair also welcomed the speakers to the meeting, including representatives from SPCA New Zealand, who shared their insights and experiences regarding the implementation of the greyhound racing ban.</p> <p>It was noted that the meeting was being recorded for the purpose of minute taking.</p>	
<p>2. Appointment of Officers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carolyn Thomas MS (CT) invited attendees to agree that that Jamie Adair (JA) would act as Secretariat. This was agreed, with no objections made. • CT was appointed as Chair, nominated by Mike Hedges MS and seconded by Buffy Williams MS. 	
<p>4. SPCA New Zealand Dr Arnja Dale, Chief Scientific Officer, SPCA Dr Alison Vaughan, Scientific Officer, SPCA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The SPCA delivered a presentation to the group, sharing their insights and experiences of implementing the greyhound racing ban in New Zealand. • Vanessa Waddon (VW) advised that the Welsh Government Implementation Group had met on Friday 11 July. Billie-Jade Thomas (BJT) noted that Sam Gaines is the RSPCA representative on the group. • Dr Alison Vaughan provided background and comparative context, noting that New Zealand has announced a ban on greyhound racing, with the industry expected to wind down by July 2026. Around 1,500 dogs are anticipated to need rehoming. Emergency legislation has already passed, prohibiting the destruction of healthy greyhounds. Currently, the rehoming system is industry-controlled with limited involvement from welfare groups. Concerns remain regarding breeding, traceability, and continued race-day deaths. A Ministerial Advisory Committee (MAC), similar in function to Wales’ implementation group, is overseeing the transition. However, legal challenges from the racing industry are ongoing. <p>Notably, the 2025/26 season has been the deadliest on record for greyhounds, since the industry was placed on notice—this includes race-day track deaths and euthanasia figures.</p> <p>Key lessons for protecting welfare during the wind down include:</p>	<p>Dr. Vaughan noted that the SPCA would be happy to share the Terms of Reference for the MAC Group, with CPG Members.</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Emergency legislation to prevent destruction of healthy greyhounds ○ Emergency legislation to prevent breeding of greyhounds for racing ○ Controls on movement of racing greyhounds ○ Welfare and traceability audits of racing kennels and rehoming partners <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● VW raised concerns in Wales that trainers are not beginning to wind down operations, likely due to the lack of a confirmed track closure date and the early stage of the implementation group's work. She noted that although the rehoming partnership includes 10 organisations, only two are GBGB-approved, meaning the others—mostly anti-racing—cannot access the official greyhound rehoming scheme. She asked whether a similar situation occurred in New Zealand, especially in light of the legal challenge, and whether the industry there is genuinely winding down or continuing as usual. ● Dr Arnja Dale confirmed that the industry remains highly resistant to cooperation on rehoming efforts, largely due to animosity toward those who campaigned for the ban. Despite the MAC’s position that rehoming organisations must be part of the solution. There is also no population modelling or visibility on when large-scale trainer exits might occur, and the hoped-for gradual wind-down has not materialised. ● Dr Alison Vaughan concluded by noting that one key recommendation they wish had been implemented earlier was the establishment of a Code of Conduct or Terms of Reference to guide members’ behaviour within the MAC group, as challenges around conduct have since emerged. 	<p style="text-align: center;">JA to circulate slides shared by the SPCA with the group following the meeting.</p>
<p>5. Animal Aid Fiona Pereira, Campaigns Manager, Animal Aid</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The presentation, about the recent Animal Aid investigation of three game farms in Wales, highlighted serious animal welfare and biosecurity concerns within the game bird farming industry in Wales, particularly the use of raised cage systems, which cause extreme stress, injury, and suffering to birds. <p>Repeated investigations found birds exposed to extreme temperatures, suffering from feather loss, foot lesions, and injuries caused by overcrowding and confinement, with widespread use of beak shrouds, back saddles, and aggression masks. Dead birds and waste are frequently left in the open, posing significant disease risks, especially amid recent outbreaks of avian flu, and following a major one at Bettws Hall in 2023. A recent FOI showed that game farms in Wales received over £500,000 in compensation in 2023, and saw over 25,000 Pheasants culled. The Animal</p>	

and Plant Health Agency (APHA) were notified about these breaches, however they have been found to be unresponsive in addressing complaints, which is unacceptable in what is an unregulated industry.

Despite these issues, there were also no official welfare inspections of game farms in Wales in 2023 or 2024.

The presentation called for an immediate ban on raised cages, a review of bird release practices during flu outbreaks, and urged members of the Senedd to conduct fact-finding visits to game farms to ensure better regulation and transparency.

- CT thanked Fiona Pereira (FP) for her presentation, noting it helped build a fuller picture beyond the brief snippets she had previously heard. She highlighted that questions have been raised twice in the Senedd regarding the introduction of game meat into school meal programmes. In response, FP pointed out that, according to the Food Standards Agency (FSA), of the 60 million game birds released annually in the UK, only around 1 million enter the food chain.

JA to share presentation slides with the group.

FP To share clips from the presentation, and the *Killing our Countryside* report with CT.

6. RSPCA General Update

Billie-Jade Thomas, Senior Public Affairs Manager (Wales), RSPCA Cymru

- The Welsh Government has confirmed it will develop proposals to license animal welfare establishments such as sanctuaries, rescues, and rehoming centres—a move strongly supported by the RSPCA and 82% of consultation respondents. This long-awaited regulation aims to ensure proper oversight and animal welfare standards, drawing on existing frameworks like those from ADCH and the British Wildlife Rehabilitation Council.
- Additionally, the RSPCA is advocating for pet abduction to be made a specific offence in Wales, following similar legislation in England and Northern Ireland, arguing that current theft laws do not reflect pets' status as sentient beings. BJT highlighted it is something other Senedd Members are interested in, including CT debate in the Senedd in January as part of a Members Proposal. It also makes up part of the new RSPCA Cymru Manifesto.
- Two bills are also progressing through UK Parliament that will impact Wales: one to tackle pet smuggling as part of the Imports of Dogs, Cats, and Ferrets bill. The RSPCA has seen around a 200% increase in reports of dogs with cropped ears in the last 5 years or so, and a lot of the time when

it comes to the enforcement side, because it is illegal here under the animal Welfare act as is tail docking, as is the declawing of cats, but as it's not illegal elsewhere in Europe and other places, further afield such as America, it is very easy for those who have had a pet mutilated here claim that they had imported their animal this way.

It will also stop pregnant animals from being imported after a certain period, and will also raise the age of animals that are able to be imported. It is currently 15 weeks, whereas this bill will raise that to 6 months. The Economy Trade and Rural Affairs Committee have considered this and are expected to release a report on this issue on the 18 July.

- Similarly with the Protection of Livestock (Amendment) Bill, currently progressing through Westminster, aims to modernise outdated livestock worrying legislation dating back to the 1950s. This is especially relevant for Wales, where sheep outnumber people three to one and incidents remain a significant concern. While the bill introduces positive changes—such as expanded police powers, broader species coverage (e.g. alpacas, llamas), and wider enforcement zones—it also raises important considerations for dog welfare. Most incidents involve dogs escaping from home, highlighting the need for responsible pet ownership. The Senedd is expected to pass the Legislative Consent Motion without issue, with a quick vote anticipated this week.

BJT is drafting a statement that emphasises that extreme penalties are not usually applied to pet theft as high-value pets don't equate to large-scale financial theft in legal terms, underscoring the need for reform. Collaboration is encouraged, and anyone interested in supporting the work is welcome to get in touch with Billie directly.

7. Updates from the group

- CT opened the discussion by inviting group members to share any updates.
- VW updated on the recent meeting of the Greyhound Ban Implementation Group. The working group met on Friday 11 July, and while discussions remain confidential, the minutes

will be published in due course. There is strong confidence that the legislation will pass within the expected timeframe. The Minister made it clear the priority is getting the bill through, rather than debating the rights and wrongs of greyhound racing. Members of the group showed a shared commitment to progressing the legislation with animal welfare at its heart.

Concerns were raised about the Greyhound Partnership, which has received nearly 100 rehoming requests—primarily aimed at sustaining the track rather than genuine dog handovers—highlighting a lack of meaningful transition. There was also a call for clarity on the scope of the legislation, particularly whether it will prevent dogs from being raced

<p>outside Wales, and how interim welfare issues will be addressed. The group will meet monthly, and confidence was expressed in the group's make-up and resources, with Welsh Government providing the secretariat and attending in good representation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> CT offered her support, along with Jane Dodds MS, and confirmed they are both happy to assist in any way they can. 	
<p>8. AOB & Close</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> CT (Chair of the Petitions Committee) mentioned a recent petition calling for an end to Welsh Government funding for animal experiments and redirecting support to modern, human-relevant alternatives. Though the petition was closed due to being a non-devolved matter, it was proposed as a future agenda item for group discussion. <p>Iain Green (Director of Animal Aid) noted that the petition organiser had been in contact with their Head of Science to discuss the issue in detail. He confirmed that Animal Aid is actively working on this area, particularly at present, and would be happy to contribute to the discussion at the next meeting.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Time and date of the next CPG meeting will be communicated to the group. <p><i>Meeting was brought to a close</i></p>	<p>CT invited members of the group to get in touch with any pressing priorities, emerging issues, or areas where you feel the group could make a difference. Please feel free to email jamiedadair@league.org.uk with any future work areas.</p>