



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government



## Code of Practice for the Welfare of Cats

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## Preface

Under the Animal Welfare Act 2006 (“the Act”), if you own or are responsible for an animal you have a legal duty to take reasonable steps to ensure its welfare needs are met. This code explains what you need to do to meet the standard of care the law requires. If you are a parent or guardian of a child less than 16 years old, you are responsible for any animal that child is in charge of or owns.

Breach of a provision of this code is not an offence in itself but, if proceedings are brought against you for a welfare offence under the Act, the court may take into account the extent to which you have complied with the code in deciding whether you have committed an offence or have met the required standard of care. You should not cause any unnecessary suffering to your animal; this could constitute a serious offence under the Act.

Keepers should look to their veterinary surgeon for their primary source of advice on their animal’s health and welfare. You will also find reference in the code to ‘pet care specialists’. These are people who, through qualification or experience, can provide expert advice on welfare and some aspects of health for one or more types of pet animal. Examples are animal behaviourists, veterinary nurses and dedicated welfare organisations.

To find out more about the Animal Welfare Act 2006 and details of your responsibilities under it, see Appendix 1 at the end of this code. For further sources of information, see Appendix 2.

You should be aware that the legislation cited in the code and in Appendix 1 is correct at the date of issue but may be subject to subsequent change.

This preface is not part of the code but is intended to explain its purpose and broad aims. Similarly Appendix 1, which provides information on the relevant legal requirements and Appendix 2, which lists some additional sources of information, are not part of the code.

## Introduction

Owning and caring for a pet is great fun and very rewarding, but it is also a big responsibility and a long-term financial and caring commitment. You control your pet's lifestyle; it is your responsibility to make sure that its needs are met, whatever the circumstances.

The law requires that you must take reasonable steps to ensure that your cat's needs are met including:

- a suitable environment to live in
- a healthy diet
- the ability to behave normally
- being housed with, or apart from, other animals, and
- protection from pain, suffering, injury and disease.

These are explained in more detail in sections 1-5 of this code. For further advice, speak to your vet or a pet care specialist. Other sources of information are listed in Appendix 2.

Every animal is different and as you get to know your cat, you will recognise familiar characteristics. It is important that you are able to notice any changes in behaviour, as these might indicate that your cat is distressed, ill, or is not having its needs met in some other way.

This code of practice is issued under section 14 of the Animal Welfare Act 2006 (the "Act"). This code of practice was issued by the Welsh Ministers and came into force on 28th November 2008. It applies in Wales only. The purpose of this code of practice is to provide advice on how to meet the needs of your cat. It covers all cats for which a person is responsible.

This code of practice is split into two parts. Part 1 is a summary of the details contained in the full code of practice, and named in Part 2.

**It is your responsibility to read the complete Code of Practice to fully understand your cat's welfare needs and what the law requires you to do.**



## Section 1: Environment

### Its need for a suitable environment

1.1 This section offers guidance on providing your cat with a suitable place to live.

All cats need their own resources, so you should provide enough bowls, litter trays, resting places, etc. If you have more than one cat, this means one for every cat in the house plus one extra to give the cats choices and reduce the chance that access is blocked by another cat.

### Sleeping and resting

1.2 Different cats will have different needs. Cats that are not used to living with people, such as some farm cats, may prefer to live outdoors with access to a draught free, waterproof shelter. Cats that are used to being inside are more likely to prefer the warmth and comfort of indoors.

Cats need:

- a sleeping/resting area that is clean, comfortable, dry and draught-free. In multi-cat households there should be sufficient separate places for each cat to rest
- areas to hide, such as an enclosed bed or a box, although some cats will prefer to hide under a chair or under your bed, and
- opportunities to climb and jump, such as a simple 'platform' type bed or safe access to shelves and the tops of cupboards
- to experience natural light/dark cycles where possible.

Cats need to rest/sleep for long periods. If cats cannot find somewhere they feel safe to rest, their sleep may be disrupted and this can affect their health.

### Hygiene

1.3 Part of providing a suitable environment is making sure that it is safe, clean and hygienic.

1.4 Some commonly used disinfectants and cleaning agents are toxic to cats so ensure you are using one that is safe.

### Hazards

1.5 Cats usually avoid eating things that are harmful. There are some circumstances, however, where their natural behaviour or curiosity will lead them to eat things that may be poisonous to them. Some examples are when:

- some house plants or cut flowers such as lilies that are toxic if eaten by cats. Such plants should be avoided in both the home and garden. Make sure that any large plants are in a stable container that cannot be knocked over
- your cat cleans poisonous substances from its fur. Because cats are meticulously clean animals that regularly groom, they will try to remove any substances that soil their coat. Therefore they are in danger of ingesting poisons such as paints, weedkillers, lily pollen etc. You should ensure that any potentially poisonous substances are stored safely and any spills mopped up carefully
- keep all household products, such as disinfectants containing phenols or antifreeze etc. safely shut away, and keep your cat out of the way when using them. It should be noted that not everything safe for humans, even for babies, is safe for cats
- eating human foods which are toxic for cats e.g. grapes, raisins, sultanas, currants, chocolate, sweetener

- eating medicines intended for people or other animals. It is important to only give cats specifically dispensed medicines or approved medicines from either your veterinary surgeon or a pharmacy.

**You should always contact your vet immediately if you are concerned that your cat has come into contact with anything that could be harmful.**

1.6 Other possible hazards include:

- Your cat exploring appliances that arouse its curiosity such as the drum of tumble driers.
- Falling from heights. If you live in a tall building you should ensure that windows and balconies are cat-proofed to prevent your cat from falling. A cat can climb to quite a high level and can squeeze through a very small hole, so you should check these barriers regularly.
- enclosed places where your cat's movement is restricted and is unable to control its own temperature, and which may become too hot or too cold, such as conservatories or vehicles.

## Safety at night

1.7 It may be safer to keep cats indoors at night, when risks to their health and welfare could be greater, providing this does not cause them stress.

## Travel

1.8 You may need to transport your cat by car or other vehicle. In this situation, your cat has no control over its environmental temperature, its food and where it sleeps, so, when travelling:

- before the journey, you should gradually get your cat used to a secure cat carrier by placing something with the cat's smell in it, such as a piece of bedding or toy, and allowing the cat to explore the carrier while it is in their usual environment. This

should make travelling less frightening. Reward good behaviour when getting the cat used to the carrier using favoured treats or fusses

- you should make sure that your cat is not able to move freely about by putting it in a secure cat carrier of adequate size and with good ventilation. Hold the carrier firmly in place with a seat belt, or wedge it e.g. in the foot well of your car, ensuring there is adequate ventilation. You should also ensure that the carrier is not placed where your cat will become too hot, such as in direct sunlight or next to the car's heater. Do not put the carrier in the boot of a saloon car
- where long journeys are unavoidable you should regularly offer food, water and the use of a litter tray, but only within the safe confines of the vehicle when it has stopped.

1.9 Cats should not be left unattended in a car or other vehicle. The temperature in the vehicle can become very high extremely quickly and cause heat stroke or death. **This can be life threatening.**

## Going to the toilet

1.10 Cats need to go to the toilet somewhere where they can behave naturally and feel comfortable. Cats prefer a quiet, easily accessible area away from food and water. This should be an indoor litter tray with enough suitable material, to allow them to dig and bury their eliminations. If your cat prefers to go toilet outside you may wish to provide them with a suitable place to toilet in your garden in addition to their indoor litter tray. A litter tray should be at least 1.5 times the length of your cat so they can position themselves comfortably in it.

Toileting advice:

- cats should have a litter tray and/or an area in the garden where they can dig and cover urine or faeces with soil or other material

- cats generally develop a preference for a particular type of litter when they are young. It is best to stick to the type of litter your cat prefers
- cats do not like to use heavily soiled areas, so any clumped litter or poo should be scooped out at least once a day and the whole tray should be cleaned and disinfected at least once a week. The disinfectant used should be safe for cats and thoroughly rinsed off
- a litter tray should be placed in an area where the cat feels secure and is not likely to be interrupted by other animals, especially other cats, or people
- it is best to place the litter tray away from where the cat eats, drinks and sleeps
- provide at least one litter tray per cat
- where there is more than one cat, the litter trays should be in different parts of the house, so each cat can get to them easily
- a cat that is straining to go to the toilet, or is toileting more frequently, or is toileting in unusual places than normal may be ill. Keepers should consult their vet if their cat is showing these signs or any other changes in toileting habits
- be sure to wash your hands or wear gloves when you handle your cat's litter tray and make sure that the tray is not accessible to small children
- Pregnant women, those planning to conceive, and those with compromised immune systems should avoid handling used cat litter, as it can cause an illness which can affect unborn children.

## Section 2: Diet

### Its need for a suitable diet

2.1 This section offers guidance on providing your cat with a suitable diet.

2.2 Your cat must always have access to fresh clean drinking water from a clean bowl, placed away from food. This is essential for all cats unless your vet tells you differently. Many cats may not drink large amounts but their thirst may increase in hot weather or if you feed dried food. Changes in the amount of water your cat drinks may also indicate illness.

### Balanced Diet

2.3 It is essential to provide a nutritionally balanced diet from early in a cat's life to ensure it receives essential nutrients in the correct quantities for good health. A good diet can help prevent the effects of many diseases. Veterinary advice should be sought if there is an unexplained increase or reduction in appetite.

2.4 Cats are obligate carnivores, and cannot be vegetarians. They require specific dietary components found only in meat and animal fat in order to thrive and survive. This is because many years of evolution have made them so successful at hunting that they cannot create certain nutrients from vegetables as other species can. Great care should be taken if feeding a home-prepared diet to ensure all nutritional needs are met. It is much more reliable to use an appropriate commercially prepared diet. Caution should also be taken when feeding a raw diet both to ensure it is nutritionally balanced and also to avoid feeding food that may be contaminated with infectious agents (germs). The hygiene precautions required in the handling and preparation of raw meat should be followed.

2.5 A cat's ability to digest milk is significantly reduced after it is weaned. Therefore, once weaned, is not necessary to give cats milk which can cause health problems. Milk should never be given as an alternative to essential fresh water, which must be available at all times.

2.6 A cat's dietary needs change during the course of its life with age and other factors such as illness. It is important to ensure that a cat's diet is appropriate to its current needs. Any changes made to the cat's diet should be done gradually over a number of days to avoid upsetting the digestive system.

### Healthy weight

The amount of food that an individual cat can eat will depend on the life stage and activity of your cat(s). The manufacturer's food guide on the packet of cat food can act as an initial guide, but the amount fed should be adapted to maintain a normal & healthy weight.

#### 2.7 **An obese cat is an unhealthy cat.**

Some cats will only eat as much as they need. Some, however, may overeat and become overweight leading to a reduced quality of life. Obesity can lead to many serious health problems, including diabetes and both heart and urinary tract diseases.

2.8 It is important to remember that an underweight animal may also be ill. You should, therefore, know the best weight for your cat and try to make sure that its weight stays approximately the same throughout its adult life. Seek advice from your vet if you have any concerns.



## How often to feed your cat

2.9 Cats living in the wild would eat a number of small rodents or birds during the course of a day and so pet cats may prefer to eat small meals frequently. Some cats can have constant access to a measured amount of food, across the day, and will eat small amounts when hungry. Others may have several small meals or some a couple of larger meals per day. It very much depends on the cat's preference and your lifestyle but you should try to cater for your pet's preferences so far as you can. Kittens will need feeding with small meals more frequently than adults.

2.10 The food that you give your cat should be fresh every day. The amount of food can be measured out at the beginning of the day to guard against obesity in those cats that are not so good at regulating their appetites. Read and be guided by, the feeding instructions relating to any cat foods you buy to help identify the correct amount to feed daily. Cats generally prefer to eat several small meals each day so it is a good idea to have the measured food divided up into a number of meals per day. Keepers can give some dried food in 'puzzle feeders', such as a ball that a cat rolls along the ground and that releases the food gradually. This helps keep the cat entertained and active, especially those kept in doors.

## Other dietary needs

2.11 Cats that are pregnant, feeding their kittens, ill, old or young may well have different dietary needs from the average healthy adult cat. Your vet is the best person to advise you about the care of your cat in these circumstances.

2.12 As the person responsible for your cat you are expected to:

- provide food suitable for your cat according to its age and condition
- provide enough food to keep your cat healthy but not too much to cause obesity, and
- make sure that there are as many food and water bowls available as there are cats. Spread these around so that each cat can eat separately without feeling threatened by the others. Check that all of the animals are getting adequate food and water suitable for their individual needs.

## Body Condition

### 2.13 Too thin

- Ribs can be seen on short-haired cats.
- No fat can be felt (where present the skin pouch underneath the belly is empty i.e. skin on skin).
- Tummy looks empty due to lack of fat.
- Spine and hip bones can be seen, and
- Small amount of muscle over the back and hips, upper legs feel "stringy", skull bone very obvious when stroking the head. Cat feels "bony" when stroked.

### Ideal

- Well-proportioned – your cat looks sleek.
- Waist can be seen behind the ribs.
- Belly skin pouch allowed but is not totally filled out with fat, and
- Ribs can be felt but not seen (with a slight fat covering).

### Too fat

- Ribs not easily felt as covered by a lot of fat.
- Waist not obvious and can't tell if cat has a skin pouch.
- Round body shape especially tummy (bear in mind breed differences), and
- Has difficulty jumping up on chairs/table/going up stairs.









TOO THIN		<p><b>1</b> Ribs visible on shorthaired cats. No palpable fat. Severe abdominal tuck. Lumbar vertebrae and wing of ilia easily palpated.</p>
		<p><b>2</b> Ribs easily visible on shorthaired cats. Lumbar vertebrae obvious with minimal muscle mass. Pronounced abdominal tuck. No palpable fat.</p>
		<p><b>3</b> Ribs easily palpable with minimal fat covering. Lumbar vertebrae obvious. Obvious waist behind ribs. Minimal abdominal fat.</p>
		<p><b>4</b> Ribs palpable with minimal fat covering. Noticeable waist behind ribs. Slight abdominal tuck. Abdominal fat pad absent.</p>
IDEAL		<p><b>5</b> Well-proportioned. Observe waist behind ribs. Ribs palpable with slight fat covering. Abdominal fat pad minimal.</p>
TOO HEAVY		<p><b>6</b> Ribs palpable with slight excess fat covering. Waist and abdominal fat pad distinguishable but not obvious. Abdominal tuck absent.</p>
		<p><b>7</b> Ribs not easily palpated with moderate fat covering. Waist poorly discernible. Obvious rounding of abdomen. Moderate abdominal fat pad.</p>
		<p><b>8</b> Ribs not palpable with excess fat covering. Waist absent. Obvious rounding of abdomen with prominent abdominal fat pad. Fat deposits present over lumbar area.</p>
	<p><b>9</b> Ribs not palpable under heavy fat cover. Heavy fat deposits over lumbar area, face and limbs. Distention of abdomen with no waist. Extensive abdominal fat deposits.</p>	

Diagram Courtesy of Purina Pet Team

## Section 3: Behaviour

### Its need to be able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns

3.1 This section offers guidance on your cat's behaviour.

3.2 Although cats have lived with us in our homes for centuries, their behaviour is still very close to that of their wild ancestors. Cats look and behave as they do because they are basically hunters and still need to have an outlet for these natural behaviours. Cats have learnt to adapt to our domestic routines and how we live our lives, but they also need to be able to display their natural behaviour patterns.

3.3 Cats experience a range of emotions including happiness, anxiety and fear. How they behave and their body language can help you understand what they are feeling and whether they are physically and mentally fit and healthy.

### Early experiences

3.4 Some cats are naturally more confident than others. However, the way that each cat behaves is also influenced by its early experiences, particularly during the early socialisation period of 2 to 7 weeks of life. Generally, cats that are well 'socialised' at this early age will be more likely to be able to cope confidently as adults with most new situations and people. You should ensure that your kitten is carefully and positively introduced to people, including children, with dogs and with other cats as well as to normal household sights and sounds in a careful and controlled way so that they are not harmed or made frightened but see these as positive. Young children should never be left alone with any pet for the safety of both the child and the pet.

3.5 Adult cats that have not had these early experiences may find it difficult to cope with day-to-day family life. They may find it stressful and be very nervous, hiding away a great deal of the time. As kittens may not go to new homes until around 8 weeks old or older, it is up to the keeper or breeder of the litter to make sure that the kittens are well socialised if they are to develop into confident, happy pet cats.

### Boredom and frustration

3.6 Cats rely on you to provide mentally and physically stimulating activities, especially those who live indoors-only. You should ensure that your cat has enough mental stimulation and physical exercise from you and from its environment to avoid boredom and frustration. It is your responsibility to provide opportunities for your cat to satisfy all of its behavioural needs, such as exercise, play and companionship.

3.7 Some cats that are frustrated or bored may begin to exhibit behavioural changes such as withdrawal, overeating, sleeping more and possibly aggression or over-grooming.

### Content, happy cats

3.8 Cats demonstrate happiness and contentment in a number of different ways, which vary between individuals. Pay attention to what makes your cat feel good and provide opportunities for interaction with people and play as appropriate.

Signs that your cat is feeling good may include:

- Purring.
- Rolling on the floor, showing you their stomach.
- An upright tail with a curve at the tip.

- Slow blinking of the eyes.
- Playing, either with other individuals, objects or toys.
- Resting with a relaxed body posture.
- Rubbing their faces and bodies on people, cats or objects is usually a friendly gesture.

Notice how your cat likes to be petted. Most cats prefer to be stroked on their head and under their chin. Many cats will not enjoy being petted on their stomach and may respond defensively. Many cats enjoy short, regular sessions of contact, so pay attention to signals from your cat that they have had enough and give them space as necessary.

## Signs of an unhappy cat

3.9 Cats respond to stress in different ways and it is important that you can recognise any changes in the behaviour of your cat. In most cases, where cats are anxious, stressed or afraid, they prefer to move away to a quiet and hidden location. This is normal behaviour, but is reason for concern if it happens more than just occasionally.

3.10 When a cat is frightened or cannot escape, this can lead to aggression. A cat that feels threatened may hiss, spit or lash out.

3.11 Some cats that are feeling anxious, stressed or afraid may not carry out their normal routine activities, such as eating, sleeping and grooming. Your cat may soil in the house if afraid to go outside or to use the litter tray. A cat may also urinate indoors if stressed; this is especially the case in un-neutered males or if other cats are causing it to feel stressed.

A change in a cat's normal toileting behaviour can be a sign of illness and you should seek advice from your vet. A cat who is having difficulty urinating should be treated as an emergency and veterinary advice should be sought immediately.

3.12 Signs of anxiety, stress and fear will vary from cat to cat but may include:

- being quiet and subdued; or sleeping excessively
- being very nervous and watchful
- being unusually aggressive to people or other cats
- stopping or decrease in eating, drinking or grooming
- being restless and not sleeping/sleeping excessively
- howling or making unusual vocal sounds
- panting
- soiling or urinating indoors
- persistently hiding away
- pacing or 'patrolling' around the house
- excessive grooming of the coat, or pulling out fur
- less play or exploration than usual
- being hypersensitive or over-reactive
- A hunched posture when resting, with all four paws in contact with the floor
- Ears flattened, fur stood on end, back arched.

3.13 It is important that you can recognise any of these signs of stress in your cat; some may also be signs of illness. If you are concerned, you should contact your vet who may refer you to an accredited animal behaviourist.

## Avoiding danger

3.14 Fear and anxiety are responses that enable animals to avoid dangerous situations. Animals that are put in situations where they are constantly fearful, however, become very stressed and this can affect their health and welfare.

3.15 Part of a cat's natural behaviour is hiding from a real or perceived danger as well as from stressful circumstances. Some cats prefer to

hide inside or under things while others prefer to climb up high. You should provide a secure hiding place that your cat can easily reach at all times so that it can hide away from stressful situations, such as contact with other animals or people. Make sure that such facilities are available for each cat if you have more than one.

## Predatory behaviour and play

3.16 It is natural for cats to display hunting behaviour. This is not linked to hunger, as cats that have recently eaten will sometimes still be motivated to hunt. Indoor cats do not usually have the opportunity to carry out these behaviours so keepers have the additional responsibility to ensure they are mentally and physically stimulated by playing with them and using toys that mimic hunting behaviours. These can include a lightweight rolling toy or one that involves catching behaviour, such as fishing rod type toys. Indoor cats can also find mental stimulation in feeding from 'puzzle feeders' that release dried food gradually.

3.17 Avoid using your hands and feet when playing with your cat. This inappropriate play may then become a habit which may also lead to injury when someone tries to stroke it.

## Scratching

3.18 Scratching surfaces such as trees is part of normal cat behaviour. Cats scratch objects for various reasons including to condition their claws and strengthens their muscles. Cats also have scent glands in-between the pads on their paws which produce a unique smell so scratching is also important for leaving scent marks.

3.19 Cats prefer to condition their claws on facilities tall enough for them to exercise at full stretch and stable enough so that it does not fall over when used. This is why cats often scratch furniture to condition their claws.

To avoid or reduce damage to furniture you can provide a scratching post; these are available from most pet shops or can be home made. The post should be stable and high enough for the cat to exercise at full body stretch. Scratching posts are best positioned at boundaries such as doors or windows.

## Exercise

3.20 Make sure your cat has opportunities to exercise each day to stay fit and healthy. If it does not go outside, provide suitable indoor activities to keep your cat active.

## Training

3.21 Cats do not automatically know which behaviours humans consider inappropriate and have to learn this. Negative experiences, such as being shouted at, lead to cats being frightened and anxious, which can in turn lead to undesirable behaviours such as inappropriate toileting. Instead, use praise and favoured rewards when your cat shows desirable behaviour. Reward preference will vary between cats, but can include treats from their daily food allowance, play or petting. If your cat's behaviour is worrisome or causing problems, seek the advice of a veterinarian, as there may be an underlying health issue.

The **Animal Welfare (Electronic Collars) (Wales) Regulations 2010** make it an offence for a device capable of emitting an electric shock to be attached to a dog or cat. Devices include remote training collars and 'invisible' fences that emit a shock via a collar.



## Section 4: Company

### Any need it has to be housed with, or apart from, other animals

4.1 This section offers guidance on providing your cat with suitable company.

#### Social behaviour

4.2 Cats do not necessarily require company from other cats to live a fulfilled life. The modern day cat originated from a species that lived a very solitary life and similarly many cats today prefer to live alone, although they sometimes can adapt to tolerate or live with other cats. Some cats may feel more relaxed in the company of human companions than with other cats.

#### Relations with other animals and people

4.3 Cats can adapt to living with other cats that they have grown up with or know well, but will usually feel very threatened by cats outside this well-known group. The tolerance of cats towards other cats also varies with their early experiences (see Section 3), so their ability and desire to socialise can vary enormously. It is, therefore, best not to keep unrelated or too many cats together, especially if they do not have access to the outside.

4.4 Where cats come into close contact with other cats they do not like, they may become very stressed. Therefore it is important for you to know how your cats react to other cats, both those kept in the same house as well as those in the neighbourhood. In multi-cat households individuals should be able to avoid each other.

4.5 Stressed cats may sit still, pretend to be asleep or hide, trying to avoid interactions with other cats. In some cases they may soil or urinating indoors or exhibit other signs of stress (see Section 3).

4.6 Adults or children who do not understand the needs of cats, or how to handle them correctly, can cause them stress. Responsible adults should ensure that cats in their care are handled properly and are not stressed or endangered by other adults, children or animals. Dogs should be introduced to cats very gradually and carefully; the dog should be prevented from chasing the cat during any introductions, for example, it may be best to hold the dog safely on a lead. Both the cat and the dog should be allowed to retreat to a safe place if they show signs of feeling unhappy or worried.

#### When you are away from home

4.7 You have a responsibility to make sure that your cat is cared for properly when you go away. You are always responsible for your animals needs. If you are unable to care for your cat at any time, you must make arrangements for another suitable person to look after it on your behalf. You remain legally responsible even when you are away, although the person with who the cat is left is also responsible in your absence. Many cats prefer to stay in their familiar environment, but you should take into consideration how your cat will cope in your absence, how long you will be away and whether a neighbour or cat sitter will be able to meet your cat's needs. You could consider whether a good cattery would better suit your cat, where your cat can be monitored and cared for more closely by someone knowledgeable on how to look after it. All boarding catteries must be licensed by law. When someone else is looking after your cat they are responsible for its welfare and you should ensure that they understand its needs and any special requirements that it may have.

## Numbers of animals

4.8 If a lot of animals are kept together, this can contribute to a stressful and unhealthy environment. Large numbers of animals need a great deal of care and you should not keep a large number of cats if you cannot meet their welfare needs. If they are not kept in hygienic conditions the environment can become contaminated with infectious agents and parasites that can cause disease, which may spread between animals and people.

Where multiple cats are kept together make sure there is enough space for them to get away from one another if they want to and there are enough resources for each including litter trays, beds, toys, food and water bowls.

If at any stage you find it is becoming difficult or overwhelming to care for your cats, local charities may be able to offer support.

## Section 5: Health

### Its need to be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease

5.1 This section offers guidance on the health of your cat.

#### Health care

5.2 Good health is an essential part of good cat welfare. Your cat's vet is the best person to advise you about routine health care, such as neutering, vaccination, and internal and external parasite control, as well as any health problems it may have.

As the person responsible for your cat's health you need to ensure:

- the prevention of disease. There are various vaccinations that are designed to protect your cat(s) from certain diseases
- the prevention of parasite problems – many worming and flea preparations are available. Your veterinary professional will be able to advise you about which are suitable for your cat
- the provision of a healthy balanced diet (see Section 2)
- the provision of the right environment that minimises the risk of injury and disease (see Section 1)
- prompt action if a cat becomes ill or begins to behave in an unusual way
- good dental hygiene, and
- appropriate grooming. All cats will benefit from regular grooming, but long haired cats in particular will need daily grooming to prevent their coat matting and causing illness.

#### Illness

5.3 It is important that you are aware of the signs of illness in your cat, and check for these daily, consulting a vet promptly if these occur.

Indications of illness or injury may include:

- a change in behaviour, such as becoming quiet or withdrawn
- a change in eating or drinking habits, such as a lack of appetite or excessive thirst
- a change in weight, in either direction
- signs of injury such as a swollen limb or walking in an abnormal way
- signs of disease, such as a discharge from the eyes, ears or nose, sneezing or coughing, vomiting, and changes in toileting
- signs of pain, such as not wanting to be touched in a sensitive area, and
- coat problems, such as excessive hair loss, or loss of condition, scratching or scabby skin
- a change in toileting habits such as going more or less often or using an inappropriate location.

This list is not exhaustive and any change in your cat's behaviour should alert you to the possibility that it may be ill. If you think that there is anything wrong with your cat, call your veterinary practice for advice.

#### Dental Care

5.4 The following contribute to good dental health in cats:

- a good quality, balanced diet
- avoiding sugar and sweet or sticky food
- healthy foods providing chewing exercise may be beneficial

The most effective means of plaque removal and maintaining dental health is daily tooth-brushing with a bristle brush in cats which tolerate this. Gradual introduction in young kittens is recommended. Dried food specifically designed to remove plaque is available and may assist reduction of plaque-caused disease.

## Grooming

5.5 Other natural cat behaviours include grooming and keeping the coat free from tangles. However, some cats need help with their coat care. If you have a long-haired cat, remember that you will have to groom the coat at least once a day to avoid potentially painful matts and tangles. Your cat may also need special attention when recovering from an illness or injury. When cats stop grooming themselves, keepers should seek advice from their vet, as this can be a sign of stress or disease.

## Neutering

5.6 One particularly important consideration is preventing the birth of unwanted kittens. You should, therefore speak to your veterinary surgeon if you are considering having your cat neutered. Cats can be neutered at around four months old onwards, but can be safely neutered earlier; your vet will be able to advise you about the best age. It is best to have female cats neutered before they reach puberty and first come into season, which is the time when they could get pregnant. This usually happens at around four to six months so this is why four months is the critical time to get the procedure done to avoid an unwanted litter. Kittens who are going to be neutered should be kept indoors, or in a completely secure environment away from unneutered cats, until their operation to avoid unwanted pregnancies.

Having your cat neutered has many benefits:

- female cats can have as many as three litters a year if not neutered. A cat can have up to five or six kittens per litter, potentially producing up to 18 possibly unwanted kittens a year so you may end up with more cats than you can properly care for
- neutering female cats means they will not suffer from infections of the uterus later in life
- un-neutered cats are more likely to mark by spraying strong smelling urine inside their homes
- un-neutered male cats are more likely to wander widely and to fight. Neutering them reduces the risk of abscesses resulting from fights and injuries caused by road traffic accidents
- un-neutered male cats can cause distress to neighbours by spraying near their homes, fighting with their pet cats and being noisy
- reproductive hormones can influence the behaviour of un-neutered male and female cats. This can result in the cat advertising their availability by making loud sounds ('calling') as well as fighting, wandering and marking their territory
- Feline Leukaemia Virus (FeLV) and Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV) are serious diseases spread through saliva. This is often through mutual grooming but can also be as a result of fighting. As neutered cats are less likely to wander and fight, there is less likelihood of them becoming infected or spreading these diseases to other cats, and
- neutering prevents the development of uterine cancer and reduces the risk of female cats developing mammary tumours.

If you decide not to have your cat neutered and wish to breed from it, you should seek the advice of a vet before allowing your cat to start breeding. There are a number of considerations to be taken into account which includes:

- finding suitable homes for the kittens, and
- health screening to ensure that the parents do not carry any inherited defects which may be passed on to their offspring
- avoiding an exaggerated conformation in the offspring such as having very flat faces, short legs, no tail, curled or flattened ears, having no hair – as these will lead to health and welfare problems. This is not an exhaustive list so consult your vet for further advice
- the welfare concerns from breeding domestic cats with various species of wildcats to get hybrids. These cats are often not suited to a domestic environment.

You will also need to consider the potential problem of unplanned mating.

Help may be available from various charities who offer neutering at a discounted rate for those on benefits or low incomes.

The pro's and cons of whether to neuter your cat, as well as timing, should be discussed with your veterinary surgeon to decide whether it is in the best interest of your cat.

A list of organisations who can provide further information can be found in Appendix 2

## Identification

5.7 Cats are generally identified by two methods (that may be used in combination) to help trace their keeper should they become lost. These are:

- microchipping – the preferred method of identification. A microchip is a tiny computer chip, about the size of a grain of rice, which contains a unique identification

number. It is injected under the skin of a pet by a vet or trained pet care specialist and the keeper's details are kept on a database. You should ensure that your details are kept up-to-date or changed if the cat is rehomed, as this will make it easier to find its keeper if it is lost. When a pet is found and taken to a rescue centre or a vet, it will be scanned with a reader to see if there is a microchip under the skin. The number shown on the reader will then enable the keeper to be traced

- wearing a collar that has the cat's keeper's contact details. If a cat is to wear a collar, only a correctly fitted 'quick release' or snap opening collar should be used, as it means that the cat is less likely to be trapped should the collar become caught or tangled. The collar should be of the correct size (neither too tight nor too loose) and you should be able to place two fingers underneath it when the cat is wearing it. A cat's leg or jaw may become caught in an elasticated or ill-fitting collar and this can result in serious injury. A collar can also be lost.

## What to do if your cat is missing

5.8 You should contact local vets and rescue centres as well those in a wider area as cats can travel for some distance if lost. You can also put up notices locally although be careful to avoid flyposting and ask your neighbours to look in their sheds or garages in case your cat has been accidentally shut in. If your cat is microchipped it may be identified as yours when scanned by a microchip reader and this will speed its return to you. Check online lost and found websites in your local area, and register your pet on a national lost pet database.



## Biosecurity

You should take the necessary precautions to prevent your cat becoming infected or spreading disease to other cats. In multiple cat households or premises such as cat rescues or boarding centres, there may be an increased risk of spreading infectious diseases within a confined space, therefore greater precautions should be taken. In all cases consult your veterinary surgeon.

## Weather

You should keep your cat protected from the dangers of particularly warm or cold weather. In warm weather cats can suffer heatstroke and sunburn. You should be aware of the dangers of open windows and make appropriate provisions to ensure your cat's safety. Information regarding seasonal advice can be found in Appendix xx (add Blue Cross link).

## Appendix 1: The Law

### The Animal Welfare Act 2006

**The following sections of the Act are referred to in the code and are set out here for ease of reference:**

The boxes below contain extracts from the relevant sections of the Act.

The box shaded grey summarises the relevant offences and penalties in the Act.

Section 3 of the Animal Welfare Act 2006 provides:

#### **Responsibility for animals**

- (1) In this Act, references to a person responsible for an animal are to a person responsible for an animal whether on a permanent or temporary basis.
- (2) In this Act, references to being responsible for an animal include being in charge of it.
- (3) For the purposes of this Act, a person who owns an animal shall always be regarded as being a person who is responsible for it.
- (4) For the purposes of this Act, a person shall be treated as responsible for any animal for which a person under the age of 16 years of whom he has actual care and control is responsible.

Section 4 of the Animal Welfare Act 2006 provides:

#### **Unnecessary suffering**

- (1) A person commits an offence if –
  - (a) an act of his, or a failure of his to act, causes an animal to suffer,
  - (b) he knew, or ought reasonably to have known, that the act, or failure to act, would have that effect or be likely to do so,
  - (c) the animal is a protected animal, and
  - (d) the suffering is unnecessary.

- (2) A person commits an offence if-
- (a) he is responsible for an animal
  - (b) an act, or failure to act, of another person causes the animal to suffer
  - (c) he permitted that to happen or failed to take such steps (whether by way of supervising the other person or otherwise) as were reasonable in all the circumstances to prevent that happening, and
  - (d) the suffering is unnecessary.
- (3) The considerations to which it is relevant to have regard when determining for the purposes of this section whether suffering is unnecessary include –
- (a) whether the suffering could reasonably have been avoided or reduced;
  - (b) whether the conduct which caused the suffering was in compliance with any relevant enactment or any relevant provisions of a licence or code of practice issued under an enactment;
  - (c) whether the conduct which caused the suffering was for a legitimate purpose, such as –
    - (i) the purpose of benefiting the animal, or
    - (ii) the purpose of protecting a person, property or other animal;
  - (d) whether the suffering was proportionate to the purpose of the conduct concerned;
  - (e) whether the conduct concerned was in all the circumstances that of a reasonably competent and humane person.
- (4) Nothing in this section applies to the destruction of an animal in an appropriate and humane manner.

Section 9 of the Animal Welfare Act 2006 provides:

**Duty of person responsible for animal to ensure welfare**

- (1) A person commits an offence if he does not take such steps as are reasonable in all the circumstances to ensure that the needs of an animal for which he is responsible are met to the extent required by good practice.
- (2) For the purpose of this Act, an animal's needs shall be taken to include-
  - (a) its need for a suitable environment,
  - (b) its need for a suitable diet,
  - (c) its need to be able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns,
  - (d) any need it has to be housed with, or apart from, other animals, and
  - (e) its need to be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease.
- (3) The circumstances to which it is relevant to have regard when applying subsection (1) include, in particular –
  - (a) any lawful purpose for which the animal is kept, and
  - (b) any lawful activity undertaken in relation to the animal.
- (4) Nothing in this section applies to the destruction of an animal in an appropriate and humane manner.

Section 14 of the Animal Welfare Act 2006 provides:

**Codes of Practice**

- (3) A person's failure to comply with a provision of a code of practice issued under this section shall not of itself render him liable to proceedings of any kind.
- (4) In any proceedings against a person for an offence under this Act or an offence under regulations under section 12 or 13 –
  - (a) a failure to comply with a relevant provision of a code of practice issued under this section may be relied upon as tending to establish liability, and
  - (b) compliance with a relevant provision of such a code of practice may be relied upon as tending to negative liability.

### Offences and Penalties

A person who is convicted of an offence under section 4 of the Act may be imprisoned for a maximum period of 51 weeks and/or fined. If they are convicted of an offence under section 9 (failing to ensure the animal's welfare) they can be imprisoned for the same maximum period and fined up to level 5 on the standard scale.

Proceedings may be brought up to 3 years after the offence was committed.  
Prosecutions under the Act are brought by the local authority in the Magistrates Court.

### Other legislation affecting cats

The Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966

The **Animal Welfare (Electronic Collars) (Wales) Regulations 2010** make it an offence for a device capable of emitting an electric shock to be attached to a dog or cat. Devices include remote training collars and 'invisible' fences that emit a shock via a collar.



## Appendix 2: Sources of information

### Your vet.

- The Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons, Belgravia House, 62-64 Horseferry Road, London SW1P 2AF. The website has a “find-a-vet” facility: [www.rcvs.org.uk](http://www.rcvs.org.uk)
- Local libraries for books on cat care.

### Websites such as:

- Association of Pet Behaviour Counsellors: [www.apbc.org.uk](http://www.apbc.org.uk)
- Battersea Dogs and Cats Home: [www.battersea.org.uk](http://www.battersea.org.uk)
- Blue Cross: [www.bluecross.org.uk](http://www.bluecross.org.uk)
- British Small Animal Veterinary Association: [www.bsava.com](http://www.bsava.com)
- British Veterinary Association: [www.bva.co.uk](http://www.bva.co.uk)
- Cats Protection: [www.cats.org.uk](http://www.cats.org.uk)
- International Cat Care: [www.icatcare.org](http://www.icatcare.org)
- Governing Council of the Cat Fancy in the UK: [www.gccf.org.uk](http://www.gccf.org.uk)
- PDSA: [www.pdsa.org.uk](http://www.pdsa.org.uk)
- Pet Care Trust: [www.petcare.org.uk](http://www.petcare.org.uk)

- Pet Food Manufacturers Association: [www.pfma.com](http://www.pfma.com)
- Pet Health Council: [www.pethealthcouncil.co.uk](http://www.pethealthcouncil.co.uk)
- RSPCA Cymru: [www.rspca.cymru](http://www.rspca.cymru)
- The Cat Group: [www.thecatgroup.org.uk](http://www.thecatgroup.org.uk)
- Kitten Neutering Database: [www.kind.cats.org.uk](http://www.kind.cats.org.uk)
- Welsh Government website for information on the Animal Welfare Act and to download the Code of Practice for the Welfare of Cats: [www.wales.gov.uk/animalwelfare](http://www.wales.gov.uk/animalwelfare)
- Add link to AWF Pets and Poisons leaflet