



16th December 2019

Dear Petitions Committee,

Thank you for your letter regarding Petition P-05-895 Rosa's Legacy: Introduce a scheme to help people access veterinary care for their companion animals.

The Companion Animal Welfare Group Wales (CAWGW) is pleased to have the opportunity to share the views of our members with the committee on the issue of accessibility of veterinary services for vulnerable pet owners.

CAWGW is a newly established sector group that brings together specific expertise, with the aim of improving the welfare of companion animals in Wales. As well as providing knowledge~ our member organisations provide practical support for pet owners across Wales, which puts us in a strong position to inform both the Petitions Committee and the Welsh Government on this issue.

PDSA and Blue Cross provide clinical support for the pets of low income owners across Wales by providing both free and low cost veterinary treatment through their veterinary networks. Just last year, PDSA treated over 21,600 sick and injured pets across Wales through its Pet Hospitals and clinics in Swansea, Cardiff and Llanelli, and through an expanding network of private practices delivering discounted vet care to the pets of vulnerable people in 75 of the 198 geographic postcode districts in Wales.

As well as a pet care clinic in Cwmbran which has 628 registered clients, Blue Cross also run an emergency care fund which enables -participating private vet practices to secure funding for their clients who in an emergency can't cover the cost of treatment. Last year, Blue Cross partnered with nine practices across Wales and hope to expand on this in 2020.

Across Wales, these veterinary charities as well as Dogs Trust and Cats Protection provide low cost neutering and microchipping schemes enabling dog and cat owners to get their animals neutered and microchipped without significant expense. Since 2017 in Wales 19,380 cats have been neutered and 15,809 cats microchipped through Cats Protection's Wales neutering campaign. Since 2016, Dogs Trust has neutered around 20,000 and microchipped around 25,000 dogs in Wales through their Welsh campaign. These schemes help owners overcome the barrier of the cost of neutering, and in the long term, help to prevent unwanted litters which can increase the financial burden on owners or force them into having to make the decision to give up their pets.

The Dogs Trust Hope Project works with homeless dog owners in Wales to help with their veterinary costs and to encourage pet friendly housing in hostels. In regard to an additional, but often related issue, several of our other members including Battersea and Cats Protection have recently produced reports looking specifically at the issue of pet friendly housing policies. It is a significant problem in the rental sector for both private and social housing, with many landlords having blanket bans or stringent conditions on pets. This can put low income owners in the incredibly difficult position of having to choose between a home and their animal. As a group we are advocating for more pet friendly policies and would be keen to work with the Assembly and the Welsh Government to promote these to landlords across Wales.

Figures from Joseph Rowntree Foundation's 2018 briefing on poverty suggest that 525,000 adults are living in poverty in Wales, and with the PDSA Animal Wellbeing (PAW) Report indicating that half of all households own a pet, there is clear need for affordable veterinary care within Wales.^{1,2} Whilst charitable services are focused on areas of greatest need in Wales, there are still many vulnerable pet owners outside the reach of the services of these charity models. We were pleased to see the recent statement from the Minister Lesley Griffiths make mention of the Welsh Government's intention to look at the issue around the provision of veterinary care for owners who are struggling financially. This is something we would like to work in partnership with the Welsh Government on, Blue Cross as part of their recent 'Link in the Chain' campaign have mapped low cost and free vet care across the UK and would be keen to work together on a Welsh map. CAWGW would also like to see more research done to assess the level of need across Wales, only by having a clear picture of areas of vulnerability and levels of pet ownership will charities be able to effectively plan support and intervention which will have a real impact. The petitioner suggests that the Welsh Government could fund a 'NHS' style service for animals through taxation, and we feel it is not the role of CAWGW to comment on the practicality or feasibility of this suggestion at this time. Instead, we would like to outline some clear recommendations which would help to ensure Welsh Government and third sector organisation can work together to better protect and provide for vulnerable owners and their pets across Wales.

We believe that the Welsh Government could work together with CAWGW and other interested bodies to:

- Assess the range of support available to low income pet owners or those in crisis.
- Support charities to co-ordinate the current provision of low cost and free vet care to try and ensure it is focussed in the areas of highest need.
- Promote charity services to the most vulnerable in Wales
- Support with further insight to enable more in-depth identification of the areas of highest need across Wales.
- Support charitable educational work in communities which helps prospective owners understand the lifetime cost of pet ownership

We hope the above information is useful in terms of setting out our views on how the animal welfare sector and the Welsh Government could work together to provide improved support for vulnerable pet owners. We believe these suggestions could go some way to providing the type of scheme and support the petitioner references in her original petition.

We would be happy to provide more detail to the committee if required and will be sending a copy of this letter to the Welsh Government to seek a meeting to discuss how we can take this work forward.

Best wishes,

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¹Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Poverty in Wales 2018 www.jrf.org.uk/report/poverty-wales-2018

² PDSA Animal Wellbeing (PAW) Report 2019 www.pdsa.org.uk/paw