

Number: WG 37680



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Welsh Government Consultation – Summary of Responses

Code of Practice for the Welfare of Cats

Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.
This document is also available in Welsh.

Introduction

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. The Codes of Practice explain what you need to do to meet the standard of care the law requires.

The existing Code of Practice for the Welfare of Cats reflected the science and legislation in force at that time and was made under The Animal Welfare Act 2006. A review was required to capture any changes in these areas and to ensure the standards being advised are still appropriate.

Welsh Government officials worked with Animal Welfare Network Wales to review and update the Code for consultation. The Welsh Government is grateful to the Network for their time and expert recommendations.

The Consultation

The aim of the 12 week public consultation was to give enforcement agencies, specialist interest groups and the general public the opportunity to consider and comment on the updated Code of Practice for the Welfare of Cats in Wales.

We asked one question:

“This consultation seeks views on the style, layout and content of the code and the information, advice and guidance it contains. We are particularly interested in your comments on the identification section and the advice relating to microchipping. It is important that you give as much information and evidence as possible to support your opinion. This will help us improve the accuracy and quality of the code. Comments are welcome on any part of the code”.

There were 15 responses to the consultation. A list of respondents, which includes a mixture of key organisations and individuals, is provided at Appendix 1. Examples of the suggested amendments and additions to the Code recommended by respondents are provided below, according to the section to which they apply, but it should be emphasised that not everything will be taken on board in the final version:

Section 1 – Environment

1.4 – “Suggest removing “Indoor cats and inquisitive kittens are most at risk, especially if they do not have enough to do and may investigate plants that they would normally ignore. We are unaware of any evidence that backs up this statement, and would like all cat owners to consider this risk equally.

1.9 - Would recommend adding advice on the appropriate size of litter tray, as unsuitable litter trays can lead to cat’s house soiling, which in turn can be a reason for relinquishment. Suggest adding a litter tray should be 1.5 times the length of your cat so they can position themselves comfortably in it.” **(RSPCA)**

“In trying to provide a clean environment for their cat, owners may mistakenly use dangerous cleaning agents in their house. To alert owners to the potential dangers the following could be added to section 1.3: “Some commonly-used disinfectants and cleaning agents are toxic to cats so ensure that you are using one that is safe.”

“Hazards, this section should instruct owners to contact their vet immediately if they have concerns, as the currently wording does not reflect the urgency of this situation. It should also include a link to the AWF Pets and Poisons leaflet.

This section should also outline that owners should not use dog flea treatments to treat cats as this can result in Permethrin or Pyrethroid toxicity.

Travel Section 1.8 mentions that “you could be prosecuted for causing cruelty”. There are many points within the code to which this would apply, so it is misleading to only mention prosecution here.

Going to the toilet the sixth bullet point should end with “plus one extra tray”. This is mentioned elsewhere in the document, so adding it here will maintain consistency and aid clarity.” **(BVA & BSAVA).**

1.1 “A litter tray and bowl for each cat plus one should be an aspiration unless it is clear that one or more cats are being bullied away from their food or unable/unwilling to use the toilet facilities. Each situation should be determined on its own merits and the way the cats react to it. Forcing people to follow bureaucratic rules is not conducive to good animal welfare.

1.2 Again, individual sleeping places should be available if the cats need and want them. Many owners of multi-cat households will show photos of all of their cats cramming into cardboard boxes because they like to sleep together. The owners of these cats should not be forced to spend on facilities that their cats do not want or need.

1.8 Already dealt with above. Someone transporting their cats long distances need to be able to stop to go to the toilet etc without fear of prosecution or people breaking into their car.

1.9 One litter tray per cat is only necessary if the cats need it. If they are happy to share then individual circumstances should be able to overrule bureaucratic needs”. **(SHG)**

“Under Section 1.9 on toileting we would suggest that all cats, whether indoor or outdoor are provided with a litter tray. This is to allow for changes in the cats behaviour over time which

may be due to a range of factors including an increase in cats in the area, or to address the needs of an aging cat.” **(Blue Cross)**

“Not all owners know what resources to provide their cat with. CAWGW suggests listing all of the resources a cat needs and amending section 1.1 as follows: Replace “All cats need their own resources, so you should provide enough bowls, litter trays, resting places, etc.” with “All cats need their own resources, so you should provide enough food bowls, water bowls, scratching posts, resting places, litters trays, hiding places and high places that cats can access.” **(CAWGW)**

Section 2 - Diet

“Whilst it is correct to say cats are obligate carnivores it does not necessarily follow they can’t be fed a vegetarian diet. There are now a few vegetarian commercial cat foods available which supplement vitamin d and taurine from non-animal sources. It is actually also the case that most standard animal based cat foods also have to supplement these and other vitamins as the quality of the animal derivatives used in them is so low that they would not provide adequate nutrients otherwise”. **(D.Channing)**

Puzzle feeders: At meal times it is essential that cats get mental stimulation as they are naturally inquisitive and active animals. All types of cats, including those which go outdoors, can benefit from puzzle feeder.” **(Cats Protection)**

“Balanced diet Section 2.5 of the draft Code could sensibly form part of section 2.4.

The wording for point 2.6 is confusing. We suggest a re-write to say: “A cat’s ability to digest milk is significantly reduced after it is weaned. Therefore, giving milk to adult cats is not necessary and can cause health problems. Milk should never be given as an alternative to essential fresh water, which must be available at all times.”

Section 2.6 should also make clear that this advice does not just apply to adult cats, but all cats post-weaning. Section 2. Make it clear that veterinary advice should be sought in the event of unexplained increase or reduction in appetite.

17) Diet and dental health In terms of ensuring good dental health through a balanced diet, it is important to note that plaque accumulated irrespective of diet type e.g. dry or wet. We would therefore suggest that the code highlights that the following contribute to good dental health in cats:

Ensure a good quality, balanced diet • avoid sugar and sweet or sticky food • healthy foods providing chewing exercise may be beneficial • large, fibrous kibble, specifically designed to remove plaque is available and may assist reduction of plaque-caused disease

With the above in mind, we would welcome the inclusion of the below sentence with regard to maintaining dental health at an appropriate place within the Code of Practice: 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 ideal for stress-free compliance).

Healthy weight Section 2.7 mentions “heart disease and diabetes” as examples of health problems caused by obesity. However, these are not necessarily the two most common obesity related feline diseases. For example, urinary tract disease is more common. This list should be made more accurate, or the sentence changed to the more generic “Obesity can lead to many serious health problems in cats including diabetes and both heart and urinary tract diseases”.

How often to feed your cat Obesity can be a problem in cats if owners leave out too much food, especially dried food, for them to graze on all day. Grazing may be acceptable if the food used for grazing is counted towards the overall daily food allowance. Depending on an owner’s lifestyle, the daily food allowance for their cat can be divided in to 3 or 4 small meals a day. If feeding a mix of wet and dry food along with treats, they all count towards the pet’s daily food allowance. In section 2.10, "lots of small meals" is not specific enough, so should be changed to “several small meals”

Body condition - We support the intention to include body condition diagrams to help the reader identify a healthy weight for their cat, however we would welcome further explanation at this point in the text about the concept of body condition scoring. We would also recommend using the WSAVA Body condition score chart for cats”. **(BVA & BSAVA)**

“Pet obesity is becoming a problem for cats in Wales and CAWGW member’s research has shown that many owners who have cats which are overweight are unaware of the problem. CAWGW are delighted that details about a cat’s body condition are included in section 2.9 and the group suggests that further advice about a cat’s weight could be given to owners in the code by adding the following to the end of section 2.7: “Ask your veterinary professional about what weight your cat should be and then regularly weigh them at home (or at the vets) to check if correct weight is being maintained”. **(CAWGW)**

2.2 “A cat in transit might well be safer without water in its cage. The code should be altered to state a cat should have access to clean fresh water at all reasonable times. Otherwise a simple mistake will be used for prosecution.

2.9 Body condition is an individual thing. Some people are fatter or thinner than others naturally and the same is true for animals. Outdoor cats will go off and find food or be given treats by strangers and may well suffer stress if they are confined in order to force weight loss. Again, the circumstances of the individual animal should take precedence over2. **(SHG)**

Section 3 - Behaviour

3.3 - A substantial proportion of a cat’s ability to be socialised to people is genetic, and is heavily influenced by the fathers’ ability to be socialised. Therefore, a proportion of cats will not be able to cope with new people and situations as adults, regardless of how well they are socialised as kittens. Therefore, we suggest amending the line “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.”

3.15 - We cannot infer that cats will see people's hands as 'prey'. We suggest using the words 'inappropriate play' to infer that it is a normal behaviour occurring in a way that will inconvenience owners. This can also be edited a little for brevity: "Avoid using your hands and feet when playing with your cat as this may escalate. This inappropriate play may then become a habit which may also lead to injury when someone tries to stroke it." 3.7 - Suggest changing the header 'signs of stress' to "Signs of an unhappy cat" or similar, to make it consistent with the previous header, but also to infer that a complex range of emotions are about to be described". **(RSPCA)**

Scratching posts

"Scratching posts are important for all cats and to help owners ensure that posts are positioned best for their cat the following recommendation could be inserted at the end of section 3.17:

"Scratching posts should be positioned at boundaries such as doors or windows as these locations are most suited to cat's behaviours and most likely to be used". **(Cats Protection)**

"Many owners provide their cats with scratching posts and in addition to advise around what type of posts to get CAWGW suggest adding in the following sentence as a recommendation at the end of section 3.17: "Scratching posts should be positioned at boundaries such as doors or windows as these locations are most suited to cat's behaviours and most likely to be used". **(CAWGW)**

Section 4: Company

4.3 – "suggest including "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." as the occasional cat might be very friendly and tolerant of new cats.

4.5 - suggest adding "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 spray indoors or exhibit other signs of stress (see Section 3)." This is a common tactic used by worried cats and is not well known by the public.

4.6 - suggest adding to the end of the paragraph: "Both the cat and the dog should be allowed to retreat to a safe hiding place if they begin to show signs of feeling unhappy or worried." This is because it should be the cat and dog's choice to interact, and either one of them may not wish to continue the interaction.

4.7 - Cats are often stressed and unhappy in catteries, and for many, staying home with a reliable cat sitter would be the preferred option. Therefore, we suggest softening the messaging that people 'should' consider a cattery to: "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." **(RSPCA)**

Social behaviour - We suggest adding the following to the end of this section: "Cats do not necessarily require company from other cats to live a fulfilled life and feel more relaxed in the company of human companions than with other cats."

Relations with other animals and people as explained under 'signs of stress' above, "spray" should be replaced with "urinate". **(BVA & BVSA)**

"Many people, small rescues and breeders keep large numbers of cats together. It should be stressed in the guide that if the cats are happy with their situation it is not a breach of the code". **(SHG)**

Section 5: Health and Welfare

5.3 – "Some cat owners think that their cat is being 'naughty' if it toilets in an inappropriate place, without realising that it might be the result of a health condition. Therefore we suggest adding "A change in toileting habits such as going more or less often, or using an inappropriate location."

5.4 - We don't think people understand the suffering mats can cause pets, therefore we suggest adding "Remember that you will have to groom the coat at least once a day to avoid potentially painful matts and tangles."

5.5 - We do not think there is enough evidence to state: "motherhood takes a lot out of a cat and having repeated litters may shorten her life expectancy". Whilst spayed cats do tend to live longer, there are many factors that might influence this and they are not yet well understood.

5.5 - "Un-neutered male cats are more likely to mark by spraying strong smelling urine inside their homes" - unsure if neutering affects only male cats in this aspect. Female cats also scent mark, so neutering may affect their motivation to do this too. We suggest you check this content, or remove the word 'male'. FeLV tends to be spread via mutual grooming much more so than fighting. We suggest editing this to reflect that.

We suggest removing reference to testicular cancer in "neutering prevents the development of uterine and testicular cancer, and reduces the risk of female cats developing mammary tumours.", as we are unaware of any evidence for this relationship, and the disease itself is very rare". **(RSPCA)**

"I suggest that more prominence is given to paragraph 5.5 - neutering.

There seems to be wide veterinary support for neutering domestic cats (including strays, if the apparent age of the cat makes this still safe and possible).

The advantages include maintaining a cat's health, but in the case of cats free to roam, the primary advantage is to reduce the large number of abandoned kittens. Both male and female cats should be neutered, or, in the case of females, after they have produced a desired litter.

I am not a veterinary surgeon, but have long experience of keeping cats and dogs in urban and semi-rural places". (**Dafydd Bened Walters**)

"Cats Protection champions neutering as the only humane and effective way to reduce the number of unwanted cats in the UK. Cats Protection believes that getting your cat neutered before it can breed is an essential part of responsible cat ownership. The charity particularly welcomes the advice included in the code to neuter cats from four months of age, before they reach puberty.

Cats Protection has a wealth of information and advice available online about pre-pubertal (early or kitten) neutering of cats here: <https://www.cats.org.uk/what-we-do/neutering>. The charity also provide vouchers to help owners on low income to meet the cost of neutering.

Cats Protection suggest that it would be useful to add this web link to the Code either at the back of the code or in situ in the neutering section to provide easy access to advice for cat owners about the benefits of early neutering and information about how those on low incomes can get financial support towards the cost of neutering. We also recommend that the Code mentions the Kitten Neutering Database. (KiND). KiND is an initiative from Cats Protection and respective members of the Cat Population Control Group (CPCG). The requirement to join the register is that a practice will neuter at four months or earlier".

We suggest the code is amended in section 5.5 as follows:

After: "The pros 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."

Suggested insert:

"Anyone wishing to locate a local veterinary practice that will neuter kittens at four month of age or earlier can visit the Kitten Neutering Database (KiND). This is a public search resource enabling cat owners to find a vet who has registered and offers neutering of kittens at four months or earlier." (**Cats Protection**)

"CAWGW is especially pleased to see the recommendation to neuter cats from four months of age and the extensive list of health benefits neutering has for both female and male cats. Heath- identification of cats: CAWGW welcomes the strong recommendation from the Welsh Government for cat owners in Wales to microchip their cat and keep the details up to date. However, the group believes legislation is needed in addition to the Code of Practice to ensure more owned cats are microchipped". (**CAWGW**)

Illness - The wording of the fifth bullet is confusing, and could be worded as follows to improve clarity: "Signs of disease, such as: discharge from the eyes, nose or ears; sneezing or coughing; vomiting; changes in toileting (faecal consistency or frequency, diarrhoea or constipation); changes in urination (amount, frequency, appearance of urine, difficulty passing urine)"

The seventh bullet should also be made clearer: "Coat problems, such as scratching, excessive hair loss, or scabby skin."

Neutering - We strongly support neutering kittens from 16 weeks of age, before reaching puberty, as set out in the BVA position on neutering and BSAVA position on neutering. This section should be strengthened to explicitly encourage owners to neuter their cats.

We also support the Cat Group position on early neutering and would recommend referencing this as additional guidance for when to neuter a cat.

We suggest adding the following sentence to end of the first paragraph (section 5.5):
"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 prevent unwanted pregnancies."**(BVA & BSAVA)**

S.5.5 "This reads like a promotion for the Animal Rights mantra of One Generation and OUT for all domestic animals. Spay-Neuter operation have serious downsides and for a Code to promote them in this way is irresponsible to say the least. Changes in hormones can lead to increases in diseases as well as protecting from some condition. Just as an example neutered animals need less food but their stomachs still demand the normal cat food input. So we have an animals doomed to feel hungry all of its life if it is not to become obese. Early neutering causes greater growth and puts strains on muscles and bones. We are pleased to see that the Code stresses the importance of considering all of the individual animal's needs and circumstances before deciding to neuter it. This should be far more prominent in the Code. People should not be told that their animals have a 'right' to be neutered. (As has happened in cases that have come in on the SHG help line)". **(SHG)**

Identification

"Battersea welcomes the information within the identification section however we would urge caution. Although it is best practice to both fit a quick release collar and microchip cats, there is currently no specific legislation requiring either. Microchipping can be a useful tool, in 2018 81% of dogs and 38% of cats came into our centres with a microchip. Thanks to accurate microchip details Battersea was able to reunite 844 dogs and 341 cats with their owners in 2017.

Whilst Battersea microchips all the cats that come into our centres, and strongly recommends that owners microchip and get a collar and tag for their cat, we also urge caution on potentially making this a legal requirement. It has been a legal requirement to microchip dogs in Wales since April 2016, however, there have been significant issues with the implementation of compulsory microchipping. Our survey of UK Local Authorities revealed that 35% of stray dogs in April 2018 were not microchipped, and only 29% had accurate details. It is clear, then, that compulsory microchipping of dogs is not yet complete. Until the reasons for this are properly understood, there remains doubt over how compulsory microchipping of cats could be effectively introduced". **(Battersea Dogs & Cats Home)**

"CAWGW welcomes the strong recommendation from the Welsh Government for cat owners in Wales to microchip their cat and keep the details up to date. However, the group believes legislation is needed in addition to the Code of Practice to ensure more owned cats are microchipped.

In Wales 26% of adults own a cat, (600,000 cats) but 38% (230,000) of owned cats in Wales are not microchipped¹. CAWGW believes that making microchipping of cats mandatory in Wales would result in a similar increase in microchipping that was clearly demonstrated in dogs following the introduction of the Microchipping of Dogs (Wales) Regulations 2015, and would also send a strong message that microchipping (and keeping the details up to date) is part of responsible cat ownership. As with dogs, it would be the responsibility of the cat owner to get their cat microchipped and vets would not be enforcers of the requirement to microchip. However, vets can encourage owners to microchip their cats, thus helping to reinforce the responsibilities of cat owners under the Animal Welfare Act. Most responsible rehoming charities microchip cats while cats are in their care. Many charities providing veterinary care microchip owned cats, and many CAWGW members operate schemes across Wales to assist with the cost of microchipping a cat, especially for those on low incomes". **(CAWGW)**

"At section 5.6:

As there is no obligation to scan for a microchip when an animal is presented, we would be more comfortable if this said "may" be scanned instead of "will" be scanned". **(RCVS)**

"S. 5.6 Microchips carry their own dangers. Some animals have been paralysed. Some develop sores or cancers at the chip site. Chips can also move within the animal. These problems and others should be included in the Code so that people can make their own decisions. Cat trackers are becoming more popular and should be included in the Code as an alternative". **(SHG)**

"In direct reference to the Code of Practice for the Welfare of Cats, we do agree Wales should introduce a mandatory requirement that owners chip their cats in the same way legislation stands for dogs. Not only would this benefit owners, it would benefit the animal. Even potentially save it's life. As we know through our work of RTAs, veterinarians are only obliged by law to administer pain relief. This means that when a cat involved in a road traffic accident is brought in to the practice, not always will vets carry out further necessary treatment beyond pain relief, until an owner can be located. Some good practices use an emergency fund, but this can be rare. We have known animals be euthanized as no owner came forward to go ahead with necessary procedures. Vets abide by the law to retain an animal from suffering unnecessarily, however owners have a duty to provide the necessary health and welfare conditions of the cat under section 5 of the Code, and mandatory microchip would introduce liability and compliment an owners duty for this purpose so as owners can be contacted straight away and the necessary treatment granted". **(Cats Matter)**

General Comments

"I would welcome;

—moving towards micro chipping of all cats in a similar way dogs are now.

—moving towards recognising owner responsibilities towards their pets to support animal welfare standards and public health rising including recognition of the issues of fouling.

Cats are harder to train than dogs, however currently the potential risks to public health associated with cat faeces warrant that the journey should begin with cat owner perception that they have a responsibility to train their kittens to eliminate in appropriate places. 20 years ago dog owners felt this was unreasonable and not possible and now established and enforceable. A parallel journey needs to commence with cat owners". **(Katie Plews)**

"Many cat owners, due their own fears of the cat being injured or going astray, are stopping cats going outside. I understand that a small minority of cats do not wish to go outside, however the owners need to be educated that it is a cruel act to keep cats permanently inside. Keeping a cat indoors leads to stress, inactivity and obesity

There does not appear to be any indication as to how the law will be monitored, implemented and managed". **(BDW Consulting)**

"I have read the consultation documents and write to state that I feel this represents a useful advisory document

As a lifelong passionate cat lover I see nothing that is unreasonable or should be a problem to cat owners

On reflection though should advice be included regarding cat's end of life i.e. the appropriate referral to vet for cat to be euthanised? I recognise the act does not give a lead on this.

Also with advice could there be a short annex of say helpline for owners who suddenly find they cannot provide for cat due to circumstance change e.g. illness age etc. Again this is related to passing cat to new owner". **(Dr Sandra Hulland)**

"What we would also like to add is, the British Veterinary Association released figures last year of the top reasons a cat will see a veterinarian. Sadly road traffic accidents was the top reasons cat see a vet around the UK. PetPlan figures show 230,000 cats are hit by cars every year, 25% of which are sadly fatal. This leaves 75% who do survive but guidance out there is slim to none. As a campaign focus group, we aim to help owners of RTA victims in all ways possible. Our site includes guidance on what drivers should do should they hit a cat, or what persons should do should they find a cat in the road. Guidance which is not out there otherwise, and people don't know who to call in situations such as the cat running off, out of hours and so on. We also offer guidance for owners with recovering cats, such as cage rest advice and so on. We are the only UK charity group focused on this issue solely, and offering the awareness and advise that we do. It is with this in mind we would be keen to be included in the Code's 'Sources of information' section as an additional helpline for owners. We do currently work with numerous organisations on the list including PDSA, Cats Protection, Blue Cross and International Cat Care. We have also been involved in BVA projects, most notably surrounding the RTA issue and last year's results. All of whom would be happy to vouch us I am sure. If we could be included to the list for help and guidance purposes, that would be fantastic. Our website address is": www.catsmatter.org. **(Cats Matter)**

“Whilst I appreciate the document is in draft form, it’s not in a draft form for grammar, but only for definitions. It should have been edited for grammatical errors prior to publication and is a very poor reflection upon the publisher and typist. I have not listed all the errors and hope that you amend the most obvious as listed below:

1.7 first line – requires a break between get/your

1.9 to dig and bury their eliminations. – requires spacing to be deleted

3.3 there are two 3.3 paragraphs

3.3 1st 3.3 to be deleted as this appears again in its entirety below paragraph 3.6 under

Recognising and understanding behaviour

3.10 out of alignment several times

3.10 additional blank bullet point

3.10 capital letters at the beginning of bullet points

3.16 dropped paragraph

The majority of cat lovers often keep multiple cats in a household as pets and although the code of practice touches upon this, I would like to see it pointed out the dangers of cross contamination, fighting and the increase of infections associated with multiple cats in close proximity with each other. Obviously you could not place a limit on the amount of cats a person keeps, but perhaps a figure on a suitable amount of cats to reduce contagions, could be sought.

Another item the public would be looking for when accessing this Code of Practice, would often be the nuisance value of cats. Defecating on others properties, crying or fighting through night hours and what the public who are affected by this, could possibly do to deter unwarranted behaviour.

Also the definition of cats at the beginning of the Code of Practice could be considered, as most of the public are unsure if a cat is lawfully a wild animal or a pet”. **(Diane Paul)**

Next Steps

Comments and suggested amendments will, where appropriate, be incorporated in to the Code. A final draft will be laid before the National Assembly for Wales for 40 days. If within the 40 day period, the Assembly does not resolve to annul the draft, the Minister for Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs will issue the Code in the form of the draft laid before the Assembly.

Battersea Dogs and Cats Home

Blue Cross

British Veterinary Association & British Small Animal Veterinary Association – (BVA & BSAVA)

Business Development Wales Consulting (BDW)

Cats Matter

Cats Protection

Companion Animals Welfare Group Wales (CAWGW)

Dafydd Bened Walters

Diane Paul

Giles Channing

Katie Plews

Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons

RSPCA

Dr Sandra Hlland

Self Help Group – (SHG)