



**Your Ref: DSC 182/25**

[REDACTED]  
Senior Assistant Clerk  
Windsor Framework Democratic  
Scrutiny Committee (DSC)  
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Telephone: [REDACTED]  
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12 August 2025

Dear [REDACTED]

Thank you for your letter dated 26 June 2025. You have requested an update on how a proposal from Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, Andrew Muir, MLA, to examine the case for inspecting and licensing rescue and rehoming organisations in Northern Ireland and bring forward legislation, as contained in the Department's Animal Welfare Pathway, will intersect with prospective European legislation on the welfare of dogs and cats and their traceability. The latter which also sets out provisions to oversee specified activities of animal shelters relating to cats and dogs.

As previously advised, the original proposals as published by the European Commission would require that an animal shelter is registered with a competent authority. Further, it provides the competent authority with information on the location of the establishment; the species of animals kept within it; and the maximum number of cats and dogs that can be kept in the establishment. Currently, under these European proposals, any animal shelter which keeps less than ten dogs or less than ten cats would be exempt from these requirements.

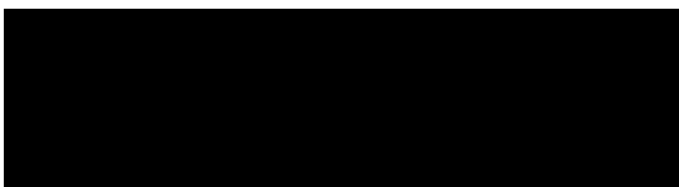
As it stands, all rescue and rehoming organisations in Northern Ireland are bound by the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011. This includes the statutory requirement to adhere to the five recognised animal welfare needs. However, rescue and rehoming centres here are not regulated nor licensed in any form.

Minister Muir has stated his desire to explore what a system of licensing and inspection would look like and determine whether this would result in improved monitoring of the rescue and rehoming sector. The Minister met with representatives from Northern Ireland Companion Animal Welfare Group, prior to finalising his Pathway, and it was recognised that an appropriate licensing process could help promote, higher, more uniform standards across this sector as well as provide members of the public with increased confidence in the way rescue and rehoming organisations operate.

The decision by the Minister to further develop policy and consult on this matter in due course will likely have a direct read across with elements of the proposed European Regulation, as published by the European Commission and which is yet to also be finalised.

The Department is aware that the European Parliament published amendments to the Regulation on 19 June 2025 and will continue to follow the passage of this piece of legislation as it makes its way through the European legislative process.

Yours sincerely,



**NEAL GARTLAND**  
**Director of Animal Health and Welfare Policy Division**



[REDACTED] Senior Assistant Clerk  
Windsor Framework Democratic Scrutiny  
Committee (DSC)

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26 June 2025

**Neal Gartland**  
**Director, Animal Health and Welfare Policy Division**

**Christopher Andrews**  
**Acting Deputy Director, Animal Health and Welfare Policy Division**

Issued via email to: [REDACTED]

Dear Neal and Christopher,

**[COM/2023/769 Proposal for a Regulation on the welfare of dogs and cats and their traceability](#)**

At its meeting on 26 June 2025, the Windsor Framework Democratic Scrutiny Committee (DSC) noted a copy of correspondence in relation to the above proposed EU act.

Officials from the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs previously attended a meeting of the DSC on 3 October 2024 to give evidence on this proposed EU act. The DSC also sought the views of key stakeholders on the proposed EU act, which can be viewed [here](#).

In the evidence session, officials stated that the proposal “contains potential requirements that are not catered for by Northern Ireland's domestic legislation”.

In a response to the Chairperson of the House of Lords Northern Ireland Scrutiny Committee, the UK Government highlighted that Minister Muir recently published the [Animal Welfare Pathway](#) for Northern Ireland, which includes plans to regulate the rescue and rehoming sector.

The DSC agreed that I should write to you to request an update on the Department's domestic policy in this area, and its potential interaction with the proposed EU Regulation, should it apply in Northern Ireland.

I would appreciate a response by 14 August 2025.

Yours sincerely,

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED], Senior Assistant Clerk  
**Windsor Framework Democratic Scrutiny Committee**