



Minister's Office
Clare House
303 Airport Road West
Sydenham Intake
Belfast BT3 9ED
Telephone: 028 774 45117
Email: paul.mcgranaghan@daera-ni.gov.uk

**FROM: PAUL MCGRANAGHAN
DAERA DALO**

DATE: 09 OCTOBER 2026

**TO: DR. JANICE THOMPSON
AERA COMMITTEE CLERK**

The Welfare of Animals (Supply of Puppies and Kittens) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026

Summary: The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs intends to make a Statutory Rule (SR), 'The Welfare of Animals (Supply of Puppies and Kittens) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026'. This SR would prohibit the third-party sale and supply of puppies, and sale of kittens, by any person who has not bred the animal themselves. The SR will also require that any sale or supply of such animals takes place at the premises where they were bred. Finally, it will introduce conditions relating to sales and advertising. The draft SR was agreed by the Executive at its meeting on 6 October 2026.

Business Area: Animal Health and Welfare Policy Division

Issue:	To advise the AERA Committee of the Department's intention to make new regulations for the sale and supply of puppies and kittens in Northern Ireland.
Restrictions:	None.
Action Required:	To note and consider the contents of this SL1, the attached draft Statutory Rule and Explanatory Memorandum.
Officials Attending:	Christopher Andrews, Deputy Director Animal Health and Welfare Policy Division (AHWPD) Catherine Goligher, Head of Animal Welfare & Dog Control Policy Branch Elizabeth Breen, Deputy Principal Policy Lead Alix McGregor, Policy Advisor

Background

The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs ("DAERA") proposes to make the above-named Statutory Rule under powers conferred on it by Section 11 (1), 2(a), 3(a) and 4 of the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 (the 2011 Act).

The Statutory Rule is subject to draft affirmative resolution procedure. A copy of the Statutory Rule is attached at **Annex A**, and the associated Explanatory Memorandum is at **Annex B**.

Purpose of legislation/policy background

The proposed Statutory Rule will strengthen protections for puppies and kittens in Northern Ireland by prohibiting the sale and supply of puppies, and the sale of kittens, where the seller or supplier has not bred the animals themselves; requiring that any sale or supply takes place at the premises where the animals were bred; and introducing specified conditions relating to sales and advertising, including:

- a requirement that the sale or supply of an animal takes place in the presence of both the prospective purchaser (or new owner) and the animal's biological mother, (with exemptions);
- a prohibition on the sale of unweaned animals, and animals under eight weeks of age;
- a requirement to declare where an animal is undergoing medical treatment;
- a requirement to include specified information in any advertisement for the sale or supply of an animal;
- a requirement to provide the new owner with advice on how to obtain information about caring for the puppy or kitten;
- a requirement to maintain relevant records relating to the sale or supply of animals; and
- a requirement that the supplier must be 16 or over.

The policy responds to calls from the public, stakeholders, and elected representatives for stronger controls to prevent young animals being sold or supplied by persons who have not bred the animals themselves.

The legislation is intended to address welfare risks associated with third-party sale and supply, including poor welfare, illness, disease, and irresponsible breeding practices. It will require purchasers to deal directly with the breeder and view the animal where it was bred, improving accountability and supporting responsible sourcing. For puppies, the mother's dog licence or breeding establishment licence address must match the address where it was bred and is being sold or supplied.

Councils, as the statutory enforcement body, will be expected to take a proportionate, reactive approach to enforcement. The legislation aims to improve traceability and transparency in puppy and kitten sales while reports of suspected third-party sales could provide valuable intelligence on unlicensed breeding activity, assisting councils in targeting enforcement action more effectively. Over time, this has the potential to strengthen compliance with breeding licence requirements, promote higher animal welfare standards and help deter poor breeding practices.

Previous Engagement with the Committee

The Committee has previously been briefed on this policy area, including before the launch of the public consultation (**ACP/25/124**) and before publication of the summary of consultation responses and way forward document (**ACP/26/33**). In February 2026, the Committee sought clarification on delivery of the proposed registration scheme (**ACP/26/57**) and in September an update on the progress of legislation was also sought (**ACP/29/179**). The Department confirmed that councils would be responsible for implementation under the 2011 Act and that its intention was to establish an implementation group with councils to address practical delivery and resource issues.

Financial Implications

There will be no direct costs to the Department arising from the introduction of this legislation. Local councils will have statutory responsibility for its enforcement.

Consultation

The Department held a twelve-week public consultation from 2 June to 25 August 2025 on proposed new rules for the sale and supply of puppies and kittens in Northern Ireland. A total of 488 responses were received, with broad support for stronger welfare protections and improved regulation of the sector. Respondents highlighted concerns about unregulated sales, misleading advertising and poor breeding practices.

Councils and other stakeholders also raised concerns about the practical delivery, resourcing and enforcement of the proposed registration scheme, particularly in relation to kittens. Reflecting this feedback, the proposed requirements relating to kittens will apply only to persons selling kittens, with those giving kittens away free of charge remaining exempt.

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A summary of consultation responses and the Department's way forward was published following the consultation and is provided at [Summary of Responses and Way Forward - Consultation on new rules for selling and supplying puppies and kittens 1.pdf](#).

The Committee was previously advised that the wider package of reforms would include a registration scheme for persons selling or supplying puppies and kittens. However, further consideration of implementing a registration scheme and additional feedback from councils highlighted that a registration scheme would not be deliverable within the current mandate.

Whilst the registration scheme would enhance traceability and support enforcement by requiring sellers and suppliers to register with their local council and have their details published on a public register, it is not essential to the delivery of the core provisions of Lucy's Law. Therefore, a phased approach has been adopted.

Under this phased approach, this SR will implement the core elements of Lucy's Law by prohibiting third-party sales and introducing associated sales and advertising conditions. Registration requirements remain a policy objective for the Department to deliver and will require a further SR to implement at a later stage.

Proceeding on this basis will allow the ban on third-party sales to be implemented at the earliest opportunity, while allowing further time for councils to develop the appropriate IT infrastructure for any future registration requirements. This approach is consistent with the Minister's commitment in the Animal Welfare Pathway 2025–27 to introduce a prohibition on third party sales of puppies and kittens (Lucy's Law), while ensuring that registration requirements will be developed in a balanced and proportionate way.

Compliance with Section 24 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998

The Regulations have no human rights implications and are not incompatible with the Northern Ireland Protocol to the EU Withdrawal Agreement. They are considered to comply with Section 24 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Consideration by the Executive

As the Statutory Rule introduces new offences and penalties, it is cross-cutting with the Department of Justice and Executive approval was therefore required. The Executive agreed the Statutory Rule at its meeting on 6 October 2026.

Equality Impact

The Department has assessed the equality implications of the Statutory Rule in accordance with Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and the DAERA Equality Scheme. It has been concluded that the proposals do not give rise to any equality, human rights or good relations issues, including in relation to Section 75 groups, as the legal requirements will apply equally to all relevant puppy and kitten sellers and suppliers. Following consideration of consultation feedback and the finalised policy position, the screening document was reviewed, and no additional impacts were identified.

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Regulatory Impact

The Department conducted a Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) that evaluated both the direct and indirect costs associated with the introduction of new requirements for all sellers and suppliers of puppies and kittens, considering implications for pet sellers/suppliers, prospective buyers, local councils, as well as the Department. The RIA was subsequently updated to reflect the phased approach and associated impacts for this Statutory Rule. It identified potential benefits, including improving welfare standards for Northern Ireland's puppies and kittens and the creation of a more accountable and fairer marketplace, helping to protect consumers and address the practices of illegal breeders, sellers and suppliers.

Rural Needs Impact

A Rural Needs Impact Assessment was completed and identified no specific impacts on people in rural areas arising from the Statutory Rule. Following consideration of relevant consultation feedback, no additional implications were identified.

Data Protection Impact

A full Data Protection Impact Assessment was not considered necessary. The Regulations will require relevant records to be retained by sellers and suppliers in relation to the puppies or kittens they sell, or puppies they supply. These records will be held by the seller or supplier and accessed by councils only where required for enforcement purposes. The Department does not consider that the Regulations give rise to significant data protection impacts.

Child Rights Impact

The policy does not directly affect children or young people, and no significant direct or indirect impacts on children's rights have been identified. A full Child Rights Impact Assessment is therefore not considered necessary.

Position in Great Britain

Northern Ireland is the only jurisdiction in the UK which has not prohibited third party sales of puppies and kittens. Protections have been introduced in Great Britain through licensing regimes which prevent licensed pet sellers from selling puppies or kittens they have not bred themselves. Licensed sellers are also required to meet specified conditions. England introduced its provision in 2020, with similar arrangements subsequently introduced in Scotland and Wales in 2021.

The proposed Northern Ireland Regulations are broadly replicatory in effect, as they will prohibit the third-party sale and supply of puppies, and sale of kittens, by persons who have not bred the animal themselves. The principal difference is that the Northern Ireland provisions will be introduced through these Regulations, rather than through an existing licensing framework; will apply to all relevant sellers and suppliers rather than only licensed businesses; and will include additional conditions as outlined above relating to sale and supply, advertising and record keeping. A key additional requirement for Northern Ireland being that the puppy or kitten must be sold/supplied at the address where it was bred. This will ensure that prospective purchasers can deal directly with the breeder, see the puppy with its biological mother and view the conditions in which it was bred.

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Position in Republic of Ireland

In the Republic of Ireland, sellers or suppliers of six or more pet animals in a calendar year must register with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM), and any premises used for the sale or supply of pet animals must also be registered. DAFM maintains publicly available registers of registered sellers and suppliers, and premises. This does not apply to dog breeding establishments or local authority facilities, which are recorded under separate local authority arrangements.

In May 2026, DAFM announced a new Dog Breeding Establishment Bill to address concerns about the commercial puppy breeding industry. The Bill includes proposals for puppy sales which broadly mirror requirements proposed here including a ban on third party sales; puppies must be at least 8 weeks old before leaving the breeding premises; may only be sold from the premises where they were bred and reared; and prospective purchasers must be able to see the puppy with its biological mother.

Offences and Penalties

The Statutory Rule will introduce new offences and penalties. It is proposed that selling or supplying a puppy, or selling a kitten, without complying with the conditions of supply would constitute an offence. This includes selling or supplying a puppy, or selling a kitten, that the supplier did not breed themselves, or doing so from an address other than the address where the puppy or kitten was bred.

Failing to comply with the record-keeping requirements, including requirements to create, maintain and retain records, would constitute an offence. In addition, placing an advertisement that does not comply with the advertising requirements, or that contains false or misleading information, would also constitute an offence.

Under the 2011 Act, anyone found guilty of an offence is subject, upon summary conviction, to a fine up to level 5 on the standard scale (£5,000) and/or six months imprisonment.

Proposed timing of consideration of the SL1

This SL1 is being submitted to the Committee in line with the minimum four-week timeframe. The Department seeks the Committee's consideration before its Oral Briefing on 12 November 2026.

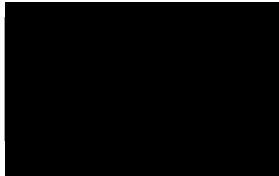
Proposed Operational Date

It is proposed, subject to Assembly agreement, that the Rule will come into operation in March 2027 (exact date TBC depending on when it is made).

The draft of the proposed Statutory Rule and Explanatory Memorandum are attached, and you will wish to bring this matter to the attention of the Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs.

This SL1 is being copied to the Human Rights Commission, Equality Commission and Assembly & Legislation Section of The Executive Office.

Yours sincerely,



Paul McGranaghan
Departmental Assembly Liaison Officer

Enc.

Annex A: Draft SR - The Welfare of Animals (Supply of Puppies and Kittens) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026

Annex B: Explanatory Memorandum - The Welfare of Animals (Supply of Puppies and Kittens) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026

Cc: Assembly & Legislation Section (Executive Office)
Human Rights Commission
Equality Commission