

EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM TO

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

[insert SR no.]

1. Introduction

1.1 This Explanatory Memorandum has been prepared by the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) to accompany the Statutory Rule (details above) which is laid before the Northern Ireland Assembly.

1.2 The Statutory Rule is made under powers conferred by section 11(1), (2)(a), (3)(a) and (4) of the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 and is subject to the draft affirmative resolution procedure.

2. Purpose

2.1 The Welfare of Animals (Supply of Puppies and Kittens) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026 applies to anyone who sells or supplies puppies, and anyone who sells kittens, under six months old, in Northern Ireland.

2.2 Rescue and rehoming organisations registered with the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland, and council-operated dog pounds, are exempt.

2.3 The Regulations:

- i. prohibit the sale and supply of puppies, and the sale of kittens, under six months old, where the seller or supplier has not bred the animals themselves;
- ii. require that any sale or supply takes place at the premises where the animals were bred (in the case of a puppy, at the address specified on the dog licence or breeding establishment licence relating to the puppy's mother);
- iii. introduce specified conditions relating to sales and advertising, including:
 - a prohibition on the sale of unweaned animals, and animals under eight weeks of age;
 - a requirement that the supplier must be 16 or over;
 - 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, (except where separation is required for health or welfare reasons, or where the mother is deceased);

- 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, including the council district where the animal is kept, a photograph of the animal with its mother, the animal's age, where it was bred and whether it is kept in Northern Ireland, and a prescribed welfare warning, and a prohibition on false or misleading advertisements;
- a requirement to provide the new owner with advice on how to obtain information about caring for the puppy or kitten; and
- a requirement to maintain records relating to the sale or supply of animals, including the animal's date of birth, sex, the address where it was bred and kept, details of any veterinary treatment, and identifying information, together with details of the supplier, the purchaser, the date of supply and any advertisements relating to the animal; records must be completed no later than the day after supply and retained for at least three years.

3. Background

3.1 There is currently no prohibition in Northern Ireland on the commercial third-party sale of puppies and kittens. As a result, puppies and kittens may be sold or supplied by persons who did not breed the animal themselves, which can make it more difficult for purchasers to establish the animal's origin and may have implications for animal welfare.

3.2 These Regulations are intended to address that gap by providing additional welfare protections for animals offered for sale or supply, improving traceability and supporting better outcomes for animals and new owners.

4. Consultation

4.1 The Department held a public consultation for twelve weeks from 2 June to 25 August 2025, as required by Section 11(5) of the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011.

4.2 A total of 488 responses were received, of which 447 were from members of the public, seven from local councils, and the remainder from a range of animal welfare organisations, representative bodies, and other stakeholders.

4.3 Respondents generally welcomed stronger welfare protections for puppies and kittens, highlighting concerns about unregulated sales, misleading advertising and poor breeding practices. However, respondents also emphasised the need for adequate council resources, funding, enforcement powers and public awareness.

4.4 The full Summary of Responses is available on the DAERA website at [Public Consultation on proposed new rules for the sale and supply of puppies and kittens in Northern Ireland | Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs](#).

4.5 The Department is adopting a phased approach to implementation. These Regulations introduce a prohibition on the third-party sale of puppies and kittens, and supply of puppies, together with associated sales and advertising conditions. The proposed registration scheme remains a future policy objective for the Department and will require further subordinate legislation at a later date.

5. Equality Impact

5.1 An equality screening exercise was completed prior to public consultation in accordance with section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. The Department has assessed that the Statutory Rule will not give rise to any equality, human rights or good relations issues, including in respect of Section 75 groups. Following consideration of consultation feedback and the finalised policy position, the screening document was reviewed, and no additional implications were identified.

6. Regulatory Impact

6.1 A Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) was completed to assess the direct and indirect costs associated with introducing new requirements for the sale and supply of puppies and kittens. The assessment considered the potential implications for sellers and suppliers, prospective buyers, local councils and the Department. The RIA was subsequently updated to reflect the finalised policy position and associated impacts. It identified potential benefits, including improved welfare standards for puppies and kittens in Northern Ireland and the creation of a more accountable and fairer marketplace, helping to protect consumers and address the practices of illegal breeders, sellers and suppliers.

7. Rural Needs Impact

7.1 A Rural Needs Impact Assessment (RNIA) was carried out and no rural needs implications associated with the Statutory Rule were identified. Having considered feedback provided to public consultation on these matters, the Department is satisfied no additional implications have been identified.

8. Financial Implications

8.1 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.

9. Section 24 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998

9.1 This Statutory Rule complies with the requirements of section 24 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

10. EU Implications

10.1 These Regulations do not transpose an EU Directive, and no specific EU implications have been identified.

11. Parity or Replicatory Measure

11.1 The Statutory Rule is intended to broadly align Northern Ireland with the position in Great Britain, where commercial third-party sales of puppies and kittens are prohibited through licensing requirements for those selling animals as pets in the course of business.

11.2 The measure is replicatory in effect, as it will prevent persons in Northern Ireland from selling or supplying puppies, or selling kittens, that they have not bred themselves. This approach is considered necessary to support animal welfare, improve traceability and reduce opportunities for irresponsible or illegal breeding and selling practices.

11.3 The principal difference in approach is that the Northern Ireland provisions will be introduced through these Regulations, rather than through an equivalent existing licensing framework. The Regulations will also apply to all sellers and suppliers, rather than only to businesses.

12. Additional Information

12.1 For further information contact:

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