



Consultation Response

FROM THE EXTERNAL AFFAIRS WALES DEPARTMENT

National Training Framework on gender-based violence, domestic abuse and sexual violence

December 2014

RSPCA Cymru welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Welsh Government's consultation on proposals for a National Training Framework on gender-based violence, domestic abuse and sexual violence.

As outlined in [our response](#) to the National Assembly for Wales' Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee concerning the Bill's general principles, RSPCA Cymru has experienced how family pets are often used as a tool to manipulate and control victims of abuse; often preventing vulnerable individuals or families from fleeing abusive relationships.

To this end, the RSPCA's Pet Retreat scheme has, since 2002, arranged foster care for the pets of owners seeking to flee abusive relationships. This scheme has empowered many suffering from domestic abuse to escape; safe in the knowledge that their pets are being looked after in a secure environment; and that they can be re-united at a later time.

As has previously been identified by the National Assembly for Wales' Communities and Culture Committee, pet fostering schemes - such as Pet Retreat - can help *"people overcome barriers to getting out of an abusive situation"*¹ - emphasising the need for the Welsh Government to consider these issues when developing legislative proposals.

One of the primary barriers to Pet Retreat's success in Wales is the lack of fosterers. We understand this is synonymous with trends across the sector, with demand outstripping delivery. The Communities and Culture Committee previously called for the recruitment of more volunteers, and financial support for their training, and this need is more applicable now than ever.

It is tragic that domestic abuse impacts upon many individuals and families in Wales. RSPCA Cymru has experienced how perpetrators utilise family pets in such settings; using them to inhibit a victim's freedom and exercise coercive control; and animals, as such, often become victims of abuse themselves.

¹ Communities and Culture Committee – Domestic Abuse in Wales, December 2008

It should, however, be noted that, whilst pets can sadly be used to manipulate victims of abuse; animals generally often occupy an exceptionally important role in family life. Their presence within a household can encourage the development of empathy and an enhanced understanding for fellow creatures.

18. If you have any related issues which we have not specifically addressed, please use this space to report them.

Whilst the link between domestic and animal abuse is well-recognised, this issue would benefit from additional research. We have previously outlined our view that a Ministerial Adviser would be well-placed to fund research into this topic, which could further inform the public sector's response. However, a survey for Paws for Kids has demonstrated the potential scale of this issue. It noted that 66 percent of abusers had threatened to harm pets, whilst 94 per cent had said it would have been easier to leave abusive situations had pet fostering services been available².

With 43 percent of households in Wales owning at least one animal³, where situations of domestic abuse exist, there is a high chance that pets may be located within that setting. It is worrying, therefore, that this issue is often not considered when issues around gender-based violence, domestic abuse and sexual violence are discussed.

In striving to implement a consistent standard of training for public and specialist third sector service professionals in Wales, it is vital that - wherever appropriate - those within this sector have knowledge, understanding and consideration of the role that pets may be experiencing within a particular abusive setting. This should include identifying situations where concerns about pet safety and welfare may be acting as a barrier to an individual speaking out, or fleeing abusive situations. Additionally, knowledge of available support - such as pet fostering schemes - is also vital, and could ultimately assist victims in gaining the additional support they need to flee abusive situations.

A proportionate understanding of this issue is important across the proposed Training Framework and its various Levels. This could include, for example, understanding and identifying the potential role of pets when seeking to recognise signs of gender-based violence, domestic abuse and sexual violence at all levels; where necessary, training those to ask appropriate questions, and having the knowledge to respond appropriately to unprompted disclosure where concerns around pet safety have been flagged; and, beyond this - where required - a detailed appreciation and understanding of the role of pets in domestic abuse settings, including knowledge as to appropriate interventions.

Furthermore, information regarding pet fostering and the need to consider the role of pets within situations of domestic abuse would also be of assistance to Local Authorities and Local Health

² Paws for Kids data; referenced here: http://www.pawsforkids.org.uk/newsletters/PFK_AR_2012_13.pdf

³ Welsh Government's National Survey for Wales, 2009/2010, Chapter 12 – Pet Ownership. See: <http://wales.gov.uk/docs/statistics/2011/110224sb142011en.pdf>

Boards in preparing and implementing local strategies. Generally, RSPCA Cymru would welcome opportunities to work with Local Authorities and LHBs to ensure options available via *PetRetreat* are acknowledged and promoted, and to ensure the scheme's availability within a locality is emphasised at appropriate levels.

19. Please indicate here if you believe you currently offer training which should be considered for the specialist subject syllabus at level 4.

RSPCA Cymru would be happy to assist, where possible, with the development of any materials highlighting the significant role many pets sadly endure in abusive relationships or settings; and also promote to relevant authorities the existence of support packages, such as pet fostering schemes, which may be helpful in informing employees providing specialist support to those experiencing gender-based violence, domestic abuse and sexual violence. Such materials may have a role at the specialist subject syllabus at level 4, or elsewhere within the proposed Training Framework.

More generally, the development of support packages for victims of domestic abuse necessitates a focus on the role of pets within such settings. RSPCA Cymru believes the development of the Training Framework provides a clear opportunity to identifying those who would need the support of pet fostering schemes, promote their availability and ensure the recruitment of new volunteers; thus increasing the chances of many victims fleeing situations of gender-based violence, domestic abuse and sexual violence. Where possible, we would be very happy to provide agencies with additional information to ensure this becomes a reality.