

Report on	Paws for Thought Initiative
Date of Meeting	13 th January 2022
Reporting Officer	Kieran Gordon, Assistant Director Health, Leisure & Wellbeing
Contact Officer	Conor Breslin, Principal Environmental Health officer

Is this report restricted for confidential business?	Yes	
If 'Yes', confirm below the exempt information category relied upon	No	X

1.0	Purpose of Report
1.1	The purpose of this report provide Members with information on the “Paws for Thought Initiative”.
2.0	Background
2.1	There has recently been a lot of publicity around the illegal smuggling of puppies from Northern Ireland to Scotland in particular and also England. In some cases, the puppies may have originated from the Republic of Ireland.
2.2	Much of the publicity has arisen from people purchasing dogs from unregistered breeders or dealers and the dogs subsequently becoming unwell requiring expensive veterinary treatment. There have been reports where a number of dogs have even died due to conditions like parvovirus as a result of not having received the required vaccinations. When this happens, the owners have been unable to contact those that sold them the pup.
2.3	The aim of the initiative “Paws for Thought Initiative” is to raise awareness and seek to prevent people purchasing expensive and sickly pups from unauthorised breeders and dealers who cannot be traced when the pup subsequently dies or takes unwell. Local Councils in association with the Department of Agriculture Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA), and the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) have produced a series of eight information posters that will be periodically released to the public over the next year highlighting the problem. These contain practical advice that should be considered before people purchase a pup. There is also a DAERA Guide providing advice for people buying and caring for pups and dogs.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	This initiative seeks to ensure that the potential buyers of dogs should be fully aware of what they need to consider when they purchase a pup. The aim is to ensure that all pups purchased have come from reputable breeders, and have received all the necessary veterinary treatment prior to being sold. .

3.2	There are a number of legitimate breeders based in the Mid Ulster District Council area. Their premises will continue to be inspected on a regular basis ensuring compliance with welfare standards. The Mid Ulster District Council Enforcement Officers will also continue to visit premises in the district identified as regularly transporting dogs through the Belfast Ports to help identify false information hauliers may be presenting to port authorities.
3.3	<p>The message which will be highlighted to the public through the “Paws for Thought Initiative” can be summarised below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Do you really know where your dog is coming from? Can you be sure that the dog isn't from an illegal breeder or been stolen? ➤ If you decide to get a dog, consider rehoming an unwanted dog first. ➤ If you decide to buy a puppy, make sure to buy it from a reputable /licensed breeder who has made sure the puppy has had a good start in life. ➤ Once you have made the decision to buy a puppy, only buy one aged 8 weeks or more and make sure to see the puppy with its mother at its home. ➤ Never buy a dog or a pup that is delivered to you. ➤ Never purchase the pup at a car park or other public place. ➤ Dogs must be microchipped at 8 weeks old, and dog owners are responsible for contacting the local council and licensing their dog. ➤ Dog owners are responsible for keeping the dog under proper control, and for meeting the welfare needs of their dog.
3.4	Members are asked to note the “Paws for Thought Initiative” and the relevant information provided to the public to make sure they make informed decisions and ensure that they purchase healthy, happy pups from reputable sources. In addition, Members should be re-assured that there is ongoing work routinely undertaken by Council Enforcement Officers in helping regulate reputable breeders in the Mid Ulster District, and to follow up on reports of unauthorised breeders in conjunction with DAERA and the PSNI.
3.5	The Mid Ulster District Council website has been updated to provide links to the relevant information and information will be released via the Council's social media platforms on an intermittent basis to continue to raise awareness of this issue.
3.6	Additionally, Members are also reminded of Mid Ulster District Council's position within a province wide four-centre sub-regional model with DAERA.
3.7	Council's have a statutory responsibility for the enforcement of the Welfare of Animals Act (NI) 2011 in relation to non-farmed animals that transferred to Councils on 2 nd April 2012. Since an agreement in November 2011 (an updated in 2015 following the merging of Councils), a regional collaborative 'cluster' approach to the delivery of the new Animal Welfare Council function was implemented.
3.8	It was agreed that Fermanagh and Omagh District Council would act as the Northern Ireland lead Council for the purposes of the Welfare of Animals Act (NI) 2011. As Regional lead Council, Fermanagh and Omagh District Council have a coordinating role with all Councils and is the agreed single point of contact with DEARA and the PSNI. Mid Ulster District Council are part of the Western region that is led by Fermanagh and Omagh District Council and also includes Derry and

	<p>Strabane District Council. This includes a budget allocation as set by DEARA and as regional lead they also:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Manage the various requirements that are included in separate Memorandum of Understanding's with DAERA, PSNI and Councils and service level agreement with the appointed regional legal services ➤ Managing the activities of the regional Strategic Project Board ➤ Manage the Care & Collection Service contract for the provision of care and transportation of animals as set out in a regional tender ➤ Manage the Veterinary contract for veterinary support for Animal Welfare cases within the Western Region Councils ➤ Manage enforcement action taken in Western Region Councils as per Council's enforcement policy and files are prepared to constituent Council leads with recommendations. ➤ Manage regional Media enquiries as per Strategic Project Board Media Policy ➤ Manage and organise various training programmes on a regional basis for all staff ➤ Manage and implement the recommendations of several reviews of the service since its implementation in 2012 including the Ministerial cross Departmental review that concluded in February 2016, and Council reviews in 2013, 2015 and 2018
4.0	Other Considerations
4.1	Financial, Human Resources & Risk Implications
	Financial: N/A
	Human: Increased Enforcement Officer resource targeted at dog breeding establishments and those individuals regularly shipping dogs to the mainland. Can be derived within existing resources.
	Risk Management: Considered in line with relevant Council policies and procedures. There is no additional risks anticipated to Enforcement Officer Staff via this initiative.
4.2	Screening & Impact Assessments
	Equality & Good Relations Implications: N/A
	Rural Needs Implications: N/A
5.0	Recommendation(s)
5.1	To note the contents of this report.
6.0	Documents Attached & References
6.1	Appendix A: Paws for Thought Initiative Posters

6.2	Appendix B: Guidance for buying and caring for a puppy.
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