

# Six-point plan for pet shops

## Introduction

The key areas and recommendations outlined in the Six-Point Plan for Pet Shops that sell animals, promote essential changes that would improve pet shop management and aid local authority enforcement under the Animal Welfare Act 2006.

Under the new Act, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) is currently proposing that pet shop licences are renewed every three years and that inspections take place only on a risk managed basis. This is widely regarded as a potentially retrograde step, since under the Pet Animals Act 1951, annual licences were issued following a yearly inspection. Inspections to determine the licence renewal should be carried out at least once a year by an Environmental Health Officer accompanied by a suitably qualified veterinary/scientific inspector. Random inspections should also take place.

In order to meet minimal standards required to safeguard animal welfare and to guard against sudden health problems or adverse events such as fire, flood and theft, there should be 24-hour supervision of animals in pet shops. With regard to fire safety, a written protocol, which has been physically demonstrated to work, should be in place.

A transaction register, inventory of animals and records of any veterinary treatment and post mortem examinations would greatly assist enforcement authorities in assessing the pet shop's compliance with relevant legislation.

Explicit guidelines relating to veterinary treatment and post mortem examinations are necessary, in the interests of both animal and public health. There is growing concern about the potential of exotic pet animals to transmit diseases to humans (zoonoses) and there is therefore a need to continually assess the risk posed by the sale of exotic animals and to control any outbreaks that do occur. The recommended public health checks, combined with other measures suggested herein, would assist towards preventing, managing and reducing zoonotic disease outbreaks, where exotic animals are sold.

Although these proposed new standards for pet shops do not directly address animal husbandry, the benefits to animal and public health are manifest. Detailed guidance relating to the care and management of animals sold through pet shops will be included in comprehensive codes of practice.

## 1. Inspection

Conducting fewer statutory inspections on pet shops may ultimately represent a false economy for local authorities. As standards are allowed to decline, this could lead to a more reactive approach and therefore a greater enforcement burden on local councils and the police. Inspections carried out in the absence of a veterinary or scientific observer may lack the necessary rigour and credence.

- Pet shops to be inspected annually by an Environmental Health Officer accompanied by a suitably qualified veterinary/scientific inspector. Where 'exotic' animals, such as birds and reptiles are sold, specialist, qualified inspectors should be employed.
- Regular, unannounced inspections should also be carried out.

### Resource

Inspection costs to be covered at pet shop manager's expense (via licence fee).

## 2. Supervision

At present, pet shops are allowed to leave animals unsupervised overnight – some may even leave animals unattended over weekends. These standards are incompatible with the Animal Welfare Act 2006, which obliges pet shop managers to ensure that the animals' needs are met and that they do not suffer.

- Pet shops to provide 24 hours supervision for animals.

### Resource

Additional supervision by staff at pet shop manager's expense.

## 3. Record-keeping

The absence of a basic record-keeping system in pet shops denies Local Authority Inspectors the means of ensuring that: pet shops comply with specified stocking densities, livestock is legally sourced, and animals receive proper veterinary treatment. In the event that a (especially exotic) pathogen or epidemic event arose from a source at a pet shop, then a register of transactions would enable proper epidemiological procedures and public health protective measures to be implemented.

- A register of any transactions of animals including full names, addresses and telephone numbers of all animal suppliers and purchasers (the latter to be established on proof of ID) as well as information on the sales receipt, to be maintained by the pet shop manager.

- An inventory of animals to be kept at all times – taking into account all animals ‘in’ and all animals ‘out’, (including mortalities).
- Records of veterinary treatment (including euthanasia) and post-mortem examinations to be maintained.
- If the pet shop sells exotic animals, then records of public health inspections should be kept on the premises.

#### Resource

Record-keeping and independent verification at pet shop manager’s expense.

## 4. Veterinary treatment and post-mortem examinations

There is currently no specific requirement under the Pet Animals Act 1951 to ensure that sick or injured animals in pet shops receive proper veterinary care – only that precautions should be taken to prevent the spread amongst animals of infectious diseases. However, failure to take action to alleviate suffering is an offence under the Animal Welfare Act 2006. There is also no requirement for pet shops to ascertain causes of death in animals, which is vital if notifiable and other communicable diseases are to be diagnosed quickly and accurately. Independent verification of causes of death in animals would also assist in establishing that animals had received proper veterinary attention and would serve to improve all round accountability.

- Any sick or injured animal must receive appropriate veterinary care and treatment without delay.
- Post-mortem examinations to be carried out within 24 hours of an animal’s death by a qualified veterinary pathologist on all animals that die whilst in the custody of the pet shop, and proper records to be kept of all such examinations.

#### Resource

Veterinary treatment and post mortems to be carried out and independently verified at pet shop manager’s expense.

## 5. Fire safety

At present it is probably impossible to evacuate all animals from pet shops in the event of a fire, as more animals are housed or so contained (eg in the case of fish tanks) than can be practically removed at short notice. This measure would independently and professionally establish that no unsafe ‘over-stocking’ of animals occurs and that a protocol (to be physically demonstrated) exists to safely remove all animals in a time frame determined by fire safety inspectors.

- Independent fire safety assessment to determine:
  - a) what fire safety precautions are necessary and what measures would be needed to attain round-the-clock fire safety supervision;
  - b) in the event of a fire what time frame is required to safely remove animals from the premises\*; and
  - c) what number of animals can safely be removed from the premises\*.

(\*demonstrated in association with a practical ‘safety drill’ exercise)

- Fire safety inspections to be carried out regularly and in conjunction with the recommendations of fire safety inspectors.
- Suitable emergency precautions and written procedures must exist and be made known to all staff, including arrangements for evacuation of livestock.

#### Resource

Inspections and fire safety provisions at pet shop manager’s expense.

## 6. Public health checks

Pet shops that sell exotic animals present a greater threat to public health than those that sell domesticated animals – therefore much more stringent bio-security protocols need to be applied. The efficacy of bio-security measures can be determined through regular public health checks. These inspections would serve to identify the presence of any potentially pathogenic organisms, which could present threats to other pet animals, pet shop staff or members of the public who enter the shop.

- Regular (monthly) environmental health checks, carried out by a suitably qualified veterinary or public health officer, to survey animal faeces/cage detritus to test for potentially pathogenic/zoonotic organisms. Swab samples to be taken from intermediary surfaces such as door handles, cages, and other areas should also be tested. Faecal/other cage detritus should be randomly sampled from a minimum of 10% of animal enclosures or 10% of all animals stocked.
- All samples acquired should be investigated at registered public health laboratories. A suitably qualified veterinary or public health person should interpret results for potential pathogenesis.
- Results of tests should be kept on the pet shop premises at all times.

#### Resource

Inspections and testing at pet shop manager’s expense (via licence fee).

