

INVITATION BRIEFING TEMPLATE

DAERA PRIVATE OFFICE

INV Ref:	INV-0888-2025
To:	Andrew Muir MLA Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs
CC:	Katrina Godfrey, G_DAERA Pressoffice.Group, Sharon McFlynn, Perm Sec mailbox (perm.sec@daera-ni.gov.uk), Brian Dooher, Gemma Daly, Neal Gartland, Philip Johnston, David Kyle, Patricia Quinn-Duffy, Nigel Trimble, [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] VSAHG Coordination.
From (SO or above):	[REDACTED]
Branch:	Animal Welfare and Dog Control Policy Branch
Contact number (incl. mobile)	[REDACTED]
Name & mobile number of official(s) attending the meeting/event in support of Minister:	[REDACTED] [REDACTED]
Press Officer attending meeting/event:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes – Name of Press Officer attending <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Note taker (Business area to provide)	[REDACTED]
Windsor Framework Implementation consideration	N/A
Venue:	Alliance Meeting Room (Room 274) Parliament Buildings Ballymiscaw Stormont Belfast BT4 3XX
Date and time:	Thursday 29 January 2.00 – 2.30pm
Invitation from:	John Blair, MLA, Chair of All Party Group Animal Welfare
Invitation type (click box to check):	<input type="checkbox"/> Event <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Meeting <input type="checkbox"/> Farm Visit

INV Ref:	INV-0888-2025	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Site Visit <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify):	
Summary of event/meeting (further detail to be provided in the background section)	John Blair MLA, has written to you in his role as chair of the All-Party Group (APG) on Animal Welfare, inviting you to attend an upcoming meeting to discuss the impact of fireworks on animal welfare and to update Members on other animal welfare issues.	
Publicity (please confirm with the organiser/host and provide details of any planned publicity including media invites, press releases video content or social media articles. Please mark N/A if no publicity is taking place)	<input type="checkbox"/> If publicity is planned, please tick to confirm that the event organiser has been advised to notify DAERA Media Team at pressoffice.group@daera-ni.gov.uk	
External meeting attendees (click box to check):	<input type="checkbox"/> None <input type="checkbox"/> Not Known <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes (please specify): Confirmed attendees are listed at Annex D .	
Annexes:	Annex A:	Agenda
	Annex B:	Key issues – Background and Lines to Take
	Annex C:	Speaking notes
	Annex D:	Guest List
	Annex E:	Q&A

AGENDA

No agenda has been provided, it is expected that you will provide the update at **Annex C**, followed by questions from APG members. A list of potential questions and answers are attached at **Annex E**.

KEY ISSUE: FIREWORKS

Lines to Take:

- **I am aware of the growing concerns about the impact of fireworks on animal welfare, especially during the Halloween season.**
- **The Department of Justice is responsible for firework legislation in Northern Ireland, including licensing for purchase and possession.**
- **While we are happy to engage with the Department of Justice where it might be beneficial, my department will continue to publish key messages reminding the public of the impact fireworks can have on animals.**

Background:

1. The use of fireworks in Northern Ireland is regulated under the Explosives (Fireworks) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2002. The possession, purchase, sale, acquisition, handling or use of fireworks by a person other than a Government Inspector, Constable or representative of an enforcing authority acting in his capacity as such is prohibited except under licence. The regulations make reference to taking the health and safety of any person in to account when issuing a license but do not mention the health and safety of animals.
2. A written briefing from a coalition of animal welfare organisations on the impact of fireworks on animal welfare summarises that the unpredictable use of fireworks and poor enforcement of existing legislation is having a detrimental impact on animal welfare.
3. The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) has submitted written evidence to the gov.uk website regarding fireworks and animal welfare. According to their submission, an estimated 45% of dogs exhibit signs of fear when they hear fireworks—a statistic drawn from a University of Bristol academic paper titled “Fear responses to noises in domestic dogs: Prevalence, risk factors and co-occurrence with other fear related behaviour.” The RSPCA also notes that aversive stimuli like unpredictable loud noises—which fireworks exemplify—are especially stressful for animals. This claim is supported by another academic study, “Anthropogenic noise as a stressor in animals: a multidisciplinary perspective,” published in the *International Journal of Comparative Psychology* (Vol. 20, 2007). Based on this evidence, the RSPCA concludes there is sufficient support for the view that fireworks negatively impact animals and recommends legislative action to mitigate these effects.
4. The regulation of decibel noise limits on fireworks available to consumers is a reserved matter and falls within the responsibility of the UK government. A Private Members’ Bill on Noise control of fireworks (Fireworks (Noise Control etc) Bill) was introduced to the UK Parliament in December 2025 with the 2nd reading scheduled

for 30 January. The Bill seeks to make provision about the maximum noise levels of fireworks which may be sold to the public; to require that specified information about noise levels is included on labelling and in sales information for fireworks; to require the Secretary of State to review the impact of firework noise on the welfare of veterans, neurodivergent people, people with certain medical conditions, and animals; to provide local authorities with power to regulate the use of fireworks in certain circumstances, and to enforce such regulation; and for connected purposes.

5. You are aware that responsibility for firework legislation lies with the Department of Justice (DOJ) and they are responsible for licencing for the purchase and possession of fireworks. DOJ has stated that fireworks regulation in Northern Ireland is among the most robust and effective in the United Kingdom and is the only jurisdiction in the UK where a fireworks licence is required for members of the public and professional displays. Furthermore, display-type fireworks in Northern Ireland are limited to professional use, unlike in other jurisdictions.
6. Where circumstances require, a fireworks licence may be issued with a condition that local residents are informed in advance of the firework display. Failure to comply with the terms and conditions of a fireworks licence is an offence.
7. Robbie Butler, MLA and Vice-chairperson of the APG, brought forward a Private Members Motion on 18 November, calling on the Minister of Justice to commission an urgent and comprehensive review of fireworks legislation.
8. The penalties for breaching of the current laws will be reviewed as part of a wider sentencing review, including animal welfare, which was announced on 14 January.

KEY ISSUE: ANIMAL WELFARE PATHWAY

Lines to Take:

- Work on the Animal Welfare Pathway is progressing at pace.
- The legislation mandating the use of CCTV in slaughterhouses is drafted and the necessary steps are being taken to secure the necessary approvals for its introduction. I anticipate the legislation will be enacted by Spring 2026.
- A responsible dog ownership and animal welfare campaign was initiated in August 2025, and further tailored materials will be published throughout 2026, using key stakeholders to amplify the message.
- In terms of the other reforms included within the Pathway, significant progress is being made on policy proposals for aversive training devices, updates to microchipping legislation, dog licence fees, and home boarding requirements, with plans to initiate a public consultation during the first quarter of 2026.
- A call for evidence regarding mandatory microchipping for cats will also be undertaken. I am aware there are mixed views on a requirement to make microchipping cats mandatory and a call for evidence will help determine if an evidence base exists to support further policy intervention.
- Significant progress is being made on policy proposals for aversive training devices, updates to microchipping legislation, dog licence fees, and home boarding requirements, with plans to initiate a public consultation during the first quarter of 2026.
- Currently, mandatory microchipping for cats will also be included in that consultation, and it is anticipated that this will take the form of a call for evidence to help inform the decision-making process.
- Furthermore, ongoing policy work is progressing on potential regulation of rescue and rehoming organisations. It is likely that with officials will be in a position to engage with key stakeholders in the sector on next steps in the next few months.

Background:

1. Officials provided you with an update on the progress of the ten key reforms outlined in your Animal Welfare Pathway in December, and the proposed timelines for these. **SUB-1385-2025** refers.
2. Policy development on the remaining reforms within the pathway is at an advanced stage:

- a. a call for evidence on the microchipping of cats;
 - b. strengthening dog microchipping requirements;
 - c. provision of day-care and home-boarding for dogs and cats;
 - d. review of dog licence fees;
 - e. aversive training devices; and
 - f. regulation of rescue and rehoming organisations;
3. Final policy proposals will be presented for your consideration shortly and it is anticipated that a single, overarching consultation will launch soon after. This document will also include a call for evidence to determine if there is a substantive evidence base to make the microchipping of cats mandatory.

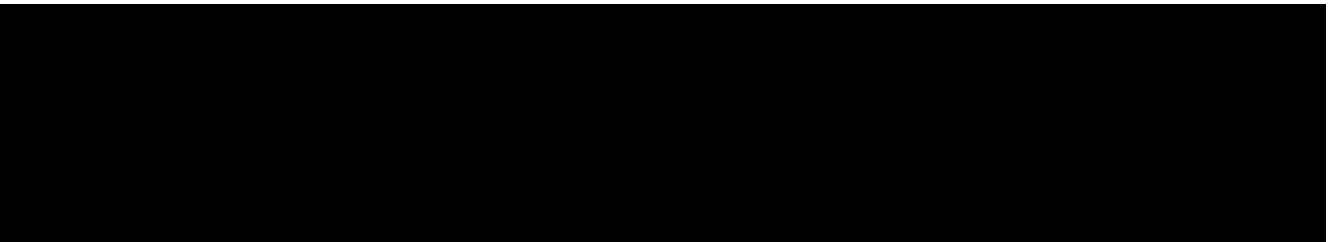
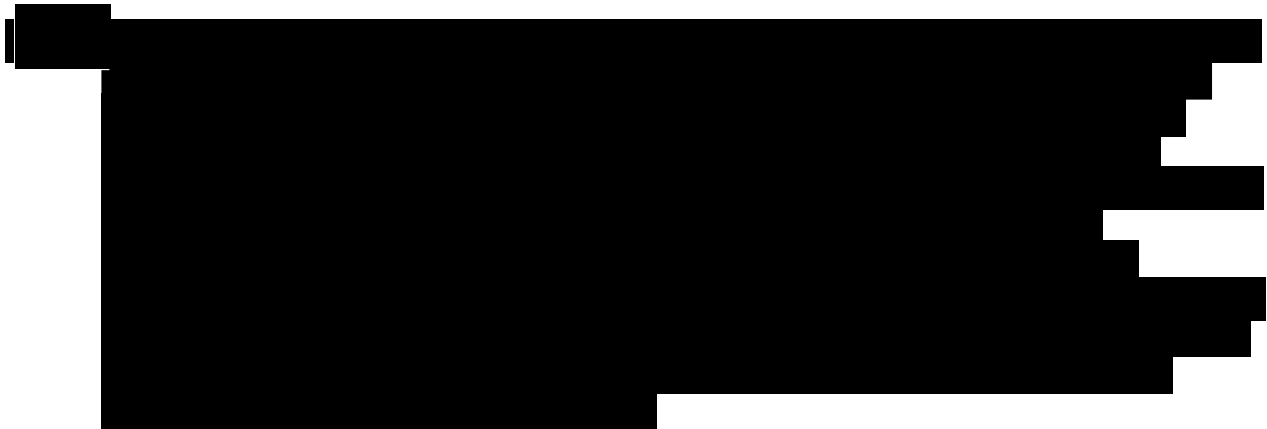
KEY ISSUE: SALE AND SUPPLY OF PUPS AND KITTENS/ LUCY'S LAW

Lines to Take:

- **Regarding Lucy's Law, as you will all be aware, a public consultation on proposed new rules for the sale and supply of puppies and kittens has concluded.**
- **The proposal goes beyond a ban on third party sales and seeks to introduce increased traceability and rigour around the sale and supply of puppies and kittens by introducing a registration requirement.**
- **I am pleased to advise that the Department received a large volume of responses to the consultation, of which the majority supported the proposals.**
- **The analysis of the consultation responses has been completed, and further consideration of the final policy position is underway.**
- **I will soon decide on the best way forward, and I anticipate the consultation response will be published shortly thereafter.**

Background:

1. You are aware that the consultation on the prohibition of third-party pet sales and the proposed registration system for persons supplying or selling puppies and kittens has closed, with most respondents supporting the proposals.



KEY ISSUE: MANDATORY CCTV IN SLAUGHTERHOUSES

Lines to Take:

- **The consultation on making CCTV mandatory in slaughterhouses has concluded, and the legislation has been drafted.**
- **Executive approval to make the legislation has been secured, along with agreement to proceed to laying the Statutory Rule before the Assembly, subject to AERA Committee consideration.**
- **it is anticipated that the legislation will be enacted by Spring 2026.**

Background:

1. Following Executive approval to make Mandatory use of Closed-Circuit Television in Slaughterhouses legislation secured on 22 January 2026 (EXEC-0003-2026 refers)., The next step is to provide briefing to the Assembly Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (AERA) Committee. A further submission seeking your approval to engage with the AERA Committee will be provided imminently.
2. The Department published its response to the public consultation in September 2025. The consultation ran for eight weeks between 26 March and 20 May 2025 and received 22 responses. A significant majority (91%) supported the introduction of Mandatory CCTV in slaughterhouses.
3. Northern Ireland currently remains the only UK jurisdiction that has not implemented the recommendations of the 2015 Farm Animal Welfare Committee (FAWC) report which advised that all approved slaughterhouses should install CCTV in all areas where live animals are present. England, Scotland and Wales have already introduced equivalent legislation
4. The policy objective is to strengthen existing animal welfare controls by ensuring:
 - CCTV is installed in all areas of a slaughterhouse where live animals are unloaded, kept, handled, stunned or killed.
 - Images are retained by the operator for a minimum of 90 days.
 - Recorded footage is made available to authorised persons to view, copy or seize.

KEY ISSUE: DOG BREEDING REVIEW AND CANINE FERTILITY SERVICES

Lines to Take:

- **The expert review of the dog breeding regulations is a very important piece of work, which requires collection and analysis of extensive evidence.**
- **The Group has undertaken extensive engagement with a broad range of stakeholders.**
- **I am encouraged by the progress of the Expert Advisory Group and it is vital that we use their expertise to carry out a thorough review and identify any deficiencies.**
- **Their report is due in April and I will carefully, but quickly, consider any recommendations made by the panel when their reports are finalised, alongside how any gaps identified can be addressed.**

Background:

1. The Department has extended the tenures of the Expert Advisory Group for a period of six-months to allow for a fully considered and comprehensive review. You met with the Chair of the Group, Professor Gareth Arnott, on Wednesday 17 December who provided you with an update on the work undertaken by the Group to that point.
2. The Group have carried out extensive stakeholder engagement and have created and issued a questionnaire for completion by those in veterinary professions which they are currently collating and analysing.
3. The Group will produce two separate reports on their designated tasks, with the report on dog breeding being available on 1 April 2026. The report on the regulation of canine fertility services is to be completed thereafter and by 1 June 2026.

KEY ISSUE: RUBY'S LAW

Lines to Take:

- **I am aware that people can harm animals as a means of harming and coercing others.**
- **I am aware that organisations such as the Links Group contend there is a strong link between violence against animals and violence against persons**
- **My remit is the welfare of animals and that is where my focus lies in this constrained mandate**
- **But I will support my DoJ colleagues and other executive ministers in any way I can on any initiative to end violence against women and girls and provide whatever direction and input is required.**

Background:

1. Ruby's Law is a legislative reform campaign in England and Wales aimed at protecting pets in domestic abuse settings. Founded by barrister Christina Warner in early 2025, which wishes to protect companion animals in domestic abuse situations by including them in protective orders (like Non-Molestation Orders). The campaign also wished to set pet abuse recognised as a form of coercive control. Causeway Coast Dog Rescue (CCDR), along with Christine Warner are campaigning for the introduction of Ruby's Law in Northern Ireland.
2. CCDR have organised and invited you to two roundtable discussions on Ruby's law at Stormont which were declined, **INV-0786-2025** and **INV-1001-2025** refer. The first roundtable was held on 30 September 2025 and the second was held on 14 January 2026. You are aware that the legislation which Ruby's Law seeks to amend sits with other Executive Departments.
3. Section 2 of The Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act (Northern Ireland) 2021 sets out what amounts to domestic abuse in criminal law. Abusive behaviour can include (but is not limited to) coercive control, psychological abuse, emotional abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, economic abuse, online and technological abuse. While the Act does not specifically mention harming animals or using animals as a means of coercive control, this section of the Act does bring controlling, coercive, emotional and psychological behaviour within the scope of the domestic abuse offence.

SPEAKING NOTES

- Thank you for the invitation to attend today and providing the opportunity for us to discuss the growing concerns in relation to fireworks and their impact on animals and, for the time to enable me to provide you with an update on my Animal Welfare Pathway.

Fireworks

- With respect to the matter of fireworks. I am conscious of the growing concerns about the impact of fireworks on animal welfare, especially during the Halloween season.
- Pets, farmed animals and wildlife can become frightened and distressed and, as a result, cause themselves injury or try to escape the associated loud noises and flashes.
- My Department carries out an awareness campaign prior to Halloween to inform the public about the impact of fireworks on animal welfare and to offer advice on reducing stress and anxiety for animals.
- Where possible, my Department co-ordinates messaging with animal welfare organisations and provides links to associated guidance.
- The Department of Justice is, however, the licensing authority for fireworks in Northern Ireland. I am aware that a fireworks licence may be issued with a condition that neighbours and animal owners, including farmers are informed in advance of the firework display.

- I have also been informed that the Department of Justice has launched a sentencing review which will include the penalties for breaching laws relating to the illegal use of fireworks to ensure they remain effective and proportionate.
- I am open to discussing the issue further with the Department of Justice as necessary.

Animal Welfare Pathway

- My Animal Welfare Pathway was launched in May last year and contains ten key priorities I intend to deliver within the remainder of the mandate.
- These priorities were determined following extensive stakeholder consultation, including animal welfare organisations and councils, to identify areas in most need of reform while taking into account the limited time remaining in the current mandate.
- I am pleased that significant progress has been made across all the reforms outlined within the pathway.
- I am expecting final policy advice on the proposal for regulation of sale and supply of puppies and kittens, following which the consultation response and way forward document will be published.
- The Department received a large volume of responses to the consultation, of which the majority supported the proposals.

- I believe that this bespoke and comprehensive policy will have a meaningful positive impact on the welfare of puppies and kittens in Northern Ireland.
- Following the publication of consultation response, the necessary steps will be taken towards introducing the legislation, subject to necessary approvals.
- Legislation requiring mandatory CCTV in slaughterhouses legislation has been drafted, and steps are being taken towards securing necessary approvals for its introduction.
- The legislation has secured Executive approval and will soon be issued to the AERA Committee for consideration.
- An Expert Advisory Group was appointed by my Department in June 2025 to review the current dog breeding regulations in Northern Ireland and consider the need to regulate Canine Fertility Clinics.
- The Group have carried out extensive Stakeholder engagement and will produce two distinct reports on their designated tasks.
- The first report, focusing on dog breeding regulations, is scheduled for publication in April; the second, concerning the regulation of canine fertility clinics, will be completed as soon as possible thereafter.

- I will quickly, but carefully, consider any recommendations made by the panel when their reports are finalised, alongside how any gaps identified can be addressed.
- In addition to the progress made on these reforms, a responsible dog ownership and animal welfare campaign was initiated in August 2025, and further tailored materials will be published throughout 2026, using key stakeholders to amplify the message.
- The campaign includes messaging for both farmed and companion animals and incorporates various forms of media formats across multiple platforms to engage as many people as possible.
- In terms of the other reforms included within my Pathway, the policy proposals for aversive training devices, updates to microchipping legislation, dog licence fees, and regulation of rescue and rehoming organisations are at an advanced stage, and I expect to be provided with policy advice on each of these shortly.
- I anticipate that the public consultation on these reforms will launch in early spring.
- Mandatory microchipping for cats will also be included in that consultation, and it is anticipated that this will take the form of a call for evidence to help inform the decision-making process.

- I remain deeply committed to taking action to improve animal welfare and making meaningful change within the mandate, and I greatly value the continued engagement with Northern Ireland Companion Animal Welfare Group.

GUEST LIST - TBC

ALL-PARTY GROUP ON ANIMAL WELFARE MEMBERS

Mr John Blair MLA, Alliance, Chairperson

Mr Robbie Butler MLA, UUP, Vice-Chairperson

Ms Cara Hunter MLA, SDLP, Secretary

Ms Clare Sugden, MLA, Independent, Treasurer

Ms Paula Bradshaw, MLA, Alliance

Mr Philip Brett MLA, DUP

Mr Keith Buchanan MLA, DUP

Mr Stewart Dickson, MLA, Alliance

Mr Stephen Dunne, MLA, DUP

Mr Patsy McGlone, MLA, SDLP

Mr Philip McGuigan, MLA, Sinn Fein

Mr Peter McReynolds, MLA, Alliance

Mr Matthew O'Toole MLA, SDLP

OBSERVERS

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Q&A

QUESTION	TAB
Key Issue 1: Fireworks	
Q.1 Given the stress caused to animals by fireworks, would you support a ban?	1
Q.2 Will your Department carry out a review of the impact of fireworks on animal welfare?	2
Key Issue 2: Animal Welfare Pathway	
Q.3 Some of the reforms outlined within the pathway require enforcement action from local councils when implemented. Will you be providing funding to support councils given they may require additional resources for this?	3
Q.4 Are you confident you will deliver the remaining reforms within the remainder of the mandate?	4
Key Issue 3: Sale and Supply of Pups and kittens/Lucy's Law	
Q.5 When will the necessary legislation be introduced?	5
Q.6 What steps will you take towards preventing puppies moving to other jurisdictions for sale?	6
Key Issue 4: Mandatory CCTV in slaughterhouses	
Q.7 When do you expect legislation to be implemented?	7
Key Issue 5: Dog breeding review and canine fertility services	
Q.8 How was the advisory group selected?	8
Q.9 Will you follow through and implement the recommendations made by the advisory group in their report?	9

KEY ISSUE 1 – FIREWORKS

Q.1 Given the stress caused to animals by fireworks, would you support a ban?

- I am aware of the growing concerns about the impact of fireworks on animal welfare, especially during the Halloween season.
- Responsibility for legislation regulating fireworks lies with the Department of Justice and ultimately any amendments to this legislation are a decision for that Department.

Q.2 Will your Department carry out a review of the impact of fireworks on animal welfare?

- Whilst I am aware of the growing concerns about the impact of fireworks on animal welfare, I have no current plans to commission a review of the impact of fireworks on animal welfare.
- My efforts are currently focused on delivering the priorities established in my Animal Welfare Pathway.
- The Department of Justice is responsible for firework legislation in Northern Ireland and ultimately any amendments to this legislation are a decision for that Department.

KEY ISSUE 2 – ANIMAL WELFARE PATHWAY

Q.3 Some of the reforms outlined within the pathway require enforcement action from local councils when implemented. Will you be providing funding to support councils given they may require additional resources for this?

- Councils are a key partner for the Department, and it is essential that we have strong working relationships.
- My Officials have had constructive engagement with councils on relevant policy areas.
- The policy details are in the process of being finalised and consideration will be given to associated implementation.

Q.4 Are you confident you will deliver the remaining reforms within the remainder of the mandate?

- It is my intention to deliver the reforms as set out in my Animal Welfare Pathway and significant progress has been made across all the priorities.
- Policy proposals for aversive training devices, microchipping enhancements, regulation of rescue and rehoming organisations are at an advanced stage, and I will consider each in turn when finalised.
- Officials are working towards launching the consultation on the remaining reforms as soon as possible.
- Thereafter, feedback will be analysed and next steps will be considered to determine what is feasible to be delivered in the remainder of the mandate.

KEY ISSUE 3 – SALE AND SUPPLY OF PUPPIES AND KITTENS

Q.5 When will the necessary legislation be introduced?

- Following publication of the consultation response and way forward document, my Department will work at pace to finalise the necessary legislation.
- Officials will be working closely with colleagues in local government on timelines for implementation.
- In tandem with this, the necessary steps will be taken towards securing the necessary approvals to introduce the legislation. I hope to be able to enact legislation by Summer 2026.

Q.6 What steps will you take towards preventing puppies moving to other jurisdictions for sale?

- I am aware that my Department has received calls to close the Lucy's Law 'loophole', where a seller can acquire a breeding licence, even in another jurisdiction, but still be legally considered "the breeder" for the purposes of Lucy's Law.
- For example, licensed sellers in England breeding pups in Northern Ireland to then be sold in England.
- This loophole, however, can only be closed by the authority in that jurisdiction, which means that anyone can legally sell puppies in another jurisdiction as long as they comply with the legislation in place in that jurisdiction.
- The legislation that I will be introducing will provide strengthened protections surrounding the sales and supply activities that take place here in Northern Ireland.

KEY ISSUE 4 – CCTV

Q.7 When do you expect legislation to be implemented?

- The legislation has been drafted and approved by the Executive Committee.
- The legislation will then move on for scrutiny by the AERA committee.
- Subject to their agreement, I hope to be able to enact the legislation of Mandatory CCTV in Slaughterhouses in early Spring.

KEY ISSUE 5 – DOG BREEDING REVIEW

Q.8 How was the advisory group selected?

- The Members of the Expert Advisory Group were selected following a recruitment competition process carried out by my Department.

Q.9 Will you follow through and implement the recommendations made by the advisory group in their reports?

- I will carefully but quickly consider any recommendations made by the panel when their reports are finalised, alongside how any gaps identified can be addressed.