



# Animal Welfare Report 2024



Department of  
**Agriculture, Environment  
and Rural Affairs**

An Roinn

**Talmhaíochta, Comhshaoil  
agus Gnóthaí Tuaithe**

Department o'

**Fairmin, Environment  
an' Kintra Matthers**

[www.daera-ni.gov.uk](http://www.daera-ni.gov.uk)





## Introduction

In Northern Ireland, the welfare of animals is governed by the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 (the 2011 Act).

The 2011 Act requires anyone who has permanent or temporary control of an animal to ensure its welfare, giving equal protection to both farmed and non-farmed animals. The law outlines five key welfare needs every animal should have met. Most owners and caretakers follow these rules, but sometimes people do fail to fulfil their responsibilities. When this happens, the Act lists specific offences related to animal welfare. For instance, failing to take reasonable measures to meet an animal’s welfare needs, or actions—or lack thereof—that result in unnecessary suffering, are considered offences under the law.

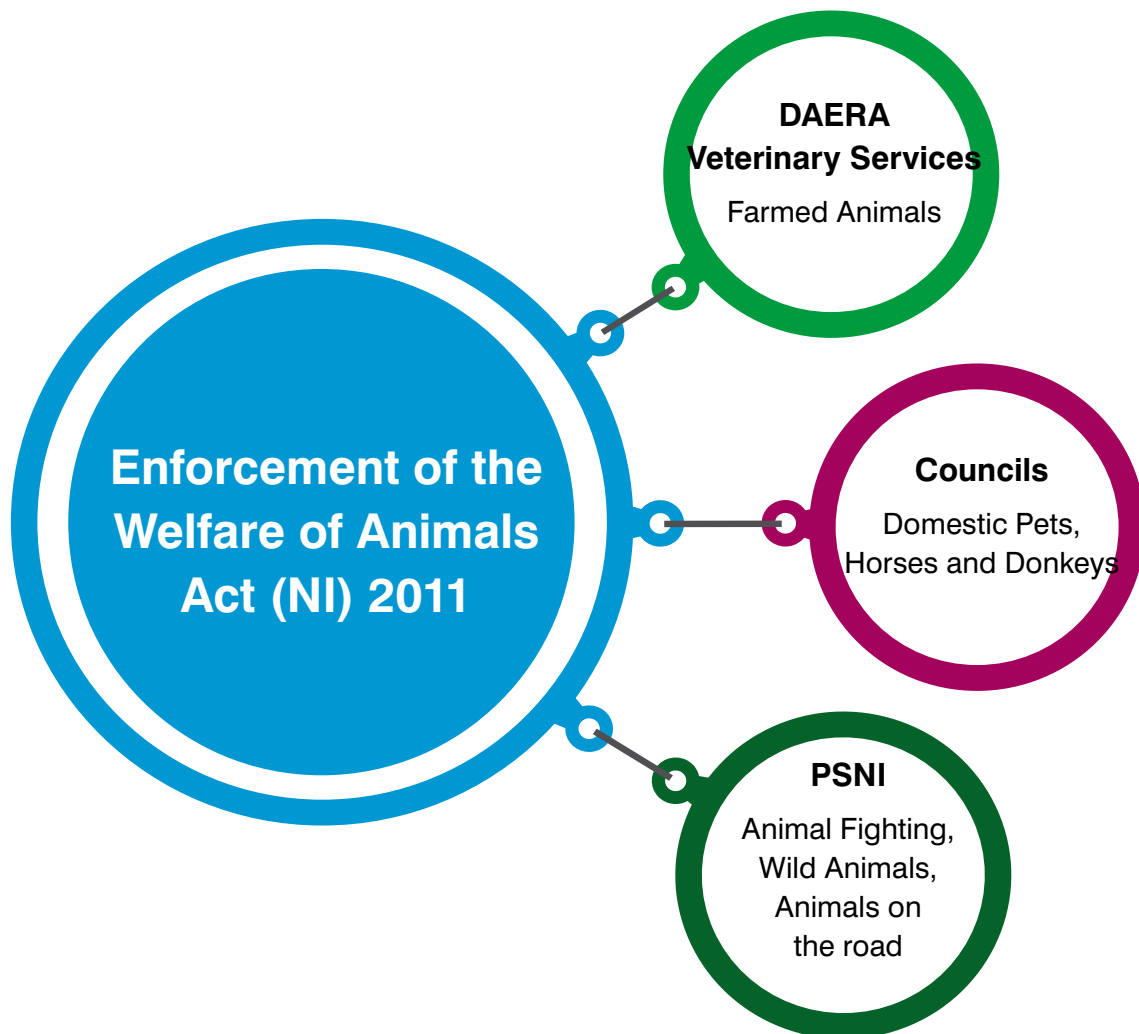
The production of an annual Animal Welfare report was recommended following a review of the implementation of the 2011 Act which concluded in 2016. This is the ninth report published by the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs and details the range and level of animal welfare enforcement activities that took place during 2024 (reporting period 1 January 2024 – 31 December 2024).





## Enforcement Responsibilities

Responsibility for the enforcement of the 2011 Act lies with three statutory agencies; the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA), the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) and local councils.



If a member of the public has any concerns regarding the welfare of an animal, they should contact the relevant enforcement body. Detailed information on the reporting process for each enforcement body along with contact details can be found on pages 12-15 of this report and at [nidirect.gov.uk](http://nidirect.gov.uk) [Animal Welfare section](#). Responsibility for the welfare of an animal remains with the relevant owner at all times.



## Investigation Procedures

Each statutory agency maintains comprehensive records of all reported concerns. These cases are referred to enforcement officers for investigation, with each matter assessed on an individual basis. The enforcement officers will consider a range of factors prior to determining the most suitable course of action. Prosecution is among several measures available to officers when addressing animal welfare cases; alternatively, they may offer advice, issue warnings, or serve legally binding improvement notices to ensure compliance by owners or keepers. In severe instances involving significant animal suffering, authorities may take animals into their possession.



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**DAERA** enforces the Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 which were made under the 2011 Act. The work is delivered by DAERA Veterinary Service Inspectors and Veterinary Officers located across Northern Ireland in 12 local DAERA Direct offices.

DAERA also has responsibility for the licensing and inspection of pet shops, animal boarding, riding and zoological establishments under the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 1972.

Inspections are carried out in response to concerns raised, for example, by members of the public or are targeted based on the identification and assessment of potential risks or issues, for example, through information provided by Departmental veterinary staff working in slaughterhouses.

Following the receipt of a complaint, it is decided at local level whether to carry out an initial or full inspection, when and by whom. An initial inspection may be carried out when it is suspected that the case is straightforward or possibly not an animal welfare related matter, e.g. improper disposal of animal by-products. A full inspection may be carried out as a follow up to an earlier initial inspection or when there is an immediate suggestion that animals are suffering unnecessarily.

	2022	2023	2024
Number of initial inspections carried out following complaint.	57	105	140
Number of full inspections completed on complaints established to be animal welfare related cases.	89	101	44
Number of inspections where a breach was detected.	32	39	14
Number of welfare seizures.	0	2	1
Total number of animals seized.	0	300	11



During 2024, Departmental Veterinary Inspectors completed 1040 production site inspections for compliance with animal welfare requirements. These inspections included routine, scheduled visits as well as randomly selected sites and 184 originated from concerns reported. The overall compliance rate was 93% representing an improvement of 2% compared to the previous reporting year.

## 2024

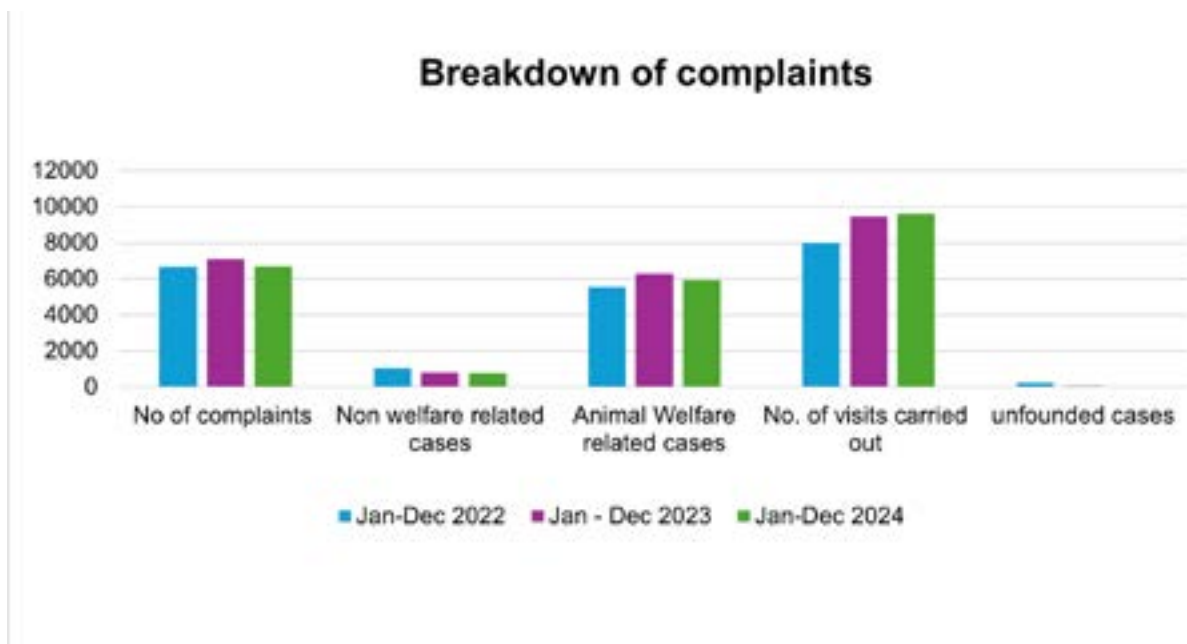




## Regional Councils' Animal Welfare Service

The 2011 Act requires local councils to enforce animal welfare requirements in respect of non-farmed animals, for example, domestic pets of any vertebrate species and equines. Councils have adopted a collaborative regional approach to delivering its animal welfare service with Council appointed Animal Welfare Officers enforcing the Act.

<b>Animal Welfare complaints received by local councils and visits carried out.</b>	<b>Jan - Dec 2022</b>	<b>Jan - Dec 2023</b>	<b>Jan - Dec 2024</b>
Number of complaints received.	5556	6284	5929
Number of visits carried out (some cases may have required more than one visit).	8011	9457	9612
Number of cases established to be unfounded/ malicious following visits by animal welfare officers.	240	48	57





Follow up action taken by Animal Welfare sections of Councils on animal welfare related cases.	Jan - Dec 2022	Jan - Dec 2023	Jan - Dec 2024
Animals voluntarily signed over to local councils.	231	222	237
Number of improvement notices issued.	138	173	200
Number of formal cautions issued.	13	7	6
Number of disposal orders issued.	14	14	13
Number of cases where seizures took place.	75	47	116
Total number of animals seized.	166	115	189

## 2024





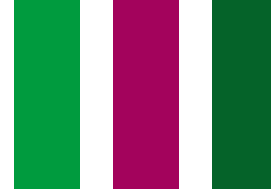
## Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI)

The 2011 Act gives the PSNI power to deal with animal fighting. In addition to its responsibilities under the 2011 Act, the PSNI has responsibility for animals on roads and wildlife crime. It also deals with offences involving wild animals and other animal-related criminal activities.

Currently, under Home Office guidelines, wildlife and animal welfare offences are not considered recordable crimes. As a result, it is not possible to gather precise data on the number of incidents reported to the PSNI.

<b>Enforcement actions taken by PSNI following concerns reported</b>	<b>Jan - Dec 2022</b>	<b>Jan - Dec 2023</b>	<b>Jan - Dec 2024</b>
Number of incidents reported which led to seizure.	56	63	69
Total number of animals seized.	152	88	107

The PSNI has a dedicated Wildlife Liaison Officer who raises awareness of wildlife and animal welfare issues within the Police Service. All investigating police officers can utilise the specialist knowledge of the central Wildlife Liaison officer to investigate cases. The PSNI also collaborate with other agencies, Police Forces and Partners from across the United Kingdom to address issues such as Equine related Crime, Road Safety and equine welfare, dog fighting, badger baiting and deer poaching.



## Criminal Proceedings

The Public Prosecution Service, the principal prosecuting authority in Northern Ireland, has responsibility for taking decisions as to prosecutions in all cases investigated by the Police, and DAERA. It will impartially consider evidence provided and decide which cases to take forward. Councils bring cases through their own legal services.

During 2024, a total of 65 prosecutions were initiated across all enforcement bodies, of these, 44 resulted in convictions. Three of the persons convicted had relevant previous convictions. Most of these prosecutions (59) were taken through the Magistrates' Courts, with the most serious crimes progressed through the Crown Court.

Four of the convictions were handed down in the Crown Court and in each case a sentence of imprisonment was imposed. Forty convictions in the Magistrates' Courts resulted in 9 terms of imprisonment, 13 suspended sentences, 9 community sentences such as an Attendance Centre Order, Supervision Order, Enhanced Combination/Combination Probation Order, Probation Order, Community Service Order, Youth Conference Order or Community Responsibility Order.

Six monetary fines were imposed and 4 Conditional Discharges issued, whereby the individual charged avoided formal conviction by adhering to specific probation terms for a specified period. In 26 of the convictions a ban was also imposed relating to a disqualification order or deprivation order.

Three convictions were recorded for breaching a court ban from keeping animals offences under Article 33(9) of the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011.

Complainant	Prosecutions	Convictions
PSNI / DPP	39	19
COUNCILS	21	21
DAERA	5	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>44</b>



## *Note:*

- 1. Figures are based on initial disposals at courts. Appeals are not included.*
- 2. Figures relate to cases where there was a prosecution, conviction of diversionary disposal, eg, caution, for at least one offence under the Welfare of Animals (Northern Ireland) Act 2011.*
- 3. Figures relate to main disposal imposed following conviction for at least one offence under the Welfare of Animals (Northern Ireland) Act 2011.*
- 4. Figures for cases where a ban was imposed relate to cases where a Disqualification Order or a Deprivation Order was imposed.*
- 5. Community Sentences relate to disposals such as Attendance Centre Order, Supervision Order, Enhanced Combination/Combination Probation Order, Probation Order, Community Service Order, Youth Conference Order or Community Responsibility Order.*

# Animal Welfare Enforcement Roles

The Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, (the 2011 Act), is enforced by DAERA (Livestock), Councils (domestic pets) and PSNI (wildlife and fighting offences). The 2011 Act sets out a range of welfare offences for which penalties may be imposed when a person has committed an offence set out in the legislation. The maximum penalty available in Northern Ireland for the most serious welfare offences is: five years imprisonment and/or an unlimited fine.

The 2011 Act enshrines the five needs of an animal in law: the need for a suitable environment; the need for a suitable diet; the need to be able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns; any need to be housed with or apart from, other animals; and the need to be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease. On occasions this can merit an improvement notice that the enforcement bodies can issue and follow up on.

Enforcement bodies: (DAERA, Councils and PSNI) investigate all animal welfare related complaints and have statutory enforcement powers to take a range of actions when investigating a complaint. Action taken will be determined by the severity of the incident. Actions can include giving advice; issuing verbal warnings; issuing improvement notices (except PSNI); and, in extreme cases of suffering, taking animals into their possession and initiating prosecution action.

Enforcement bodies are unable to comment on any active or ongoing investigations.

The Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) is responsible for farmed animals (any animal bred or kept for the production of food, wool or skin or for other farming purposes).

Councils are responsible for enforcement in respect of non-farmed animals i.e. domestic pets and equines (e.g. horses and donkeys etc).

PSNI enforce section 8 of the 2011 Act for animal fighting such as badger baiting, dog fighting or cockerel fighting. The PSNI is also responsible for wildlife crime which can include poisoning of wild birds and illegal trapping of wildlife.

If you wish to speak to someone regarding the welfare of farmed animals please contact DAERA:  
During office hours - Monday to Friday  
9am-5pm telephone - 0300 200 7840  
At weekends - contact a local Private Veterinary Practice or a local Police Station who will, as necessary, refer the welfare complaint to the relevant DAERA "on call" officer.

If you wish to speak to someone regarding the welfare of non-farmed animals i.e. domestic pets, horses, donkeys please [contact your local Council](#).  
At weekends and over holiday periods contact the same number and your call will be diverted to an answering service.

If you wish to make a complaint about animal fighting you should contact the PSNI on 101, or online at [www.psni.police.uk](http://www.psni.police.uk) or anonymously using Crimestoppers: 0800 555 111.  
PSNI can also investigate organised crime and economic crime involving animals and work with DAERA and Councils to do so.

# Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, (DAERA)

Farm animal welfare complaint received. A complainant can choose to remain anonymous. Information is gathered on the date, time, and location of the incident, a description of the animal's environment and bodily condition, and, if known, the name and address of the animal keeper

Every complaint received is reviewed. Details of complaint are recorded on DAERA's Northern Ireland Food Animal Information System.

In general, an on-farm inspection is completed within 24 hours. In exceptional circumstances, inspections may not be carried out e.g. if DAERA believes the complaint itself to be vexatious.

### Unsatisfactory

Outcome of inspection recorded on the Northern Ireland Food Animal Information System. Follow-up action will be taken as appropriate and proportionate, based on the extent and severity of the breach identified. A range of measures is available to secure compliance and protect farm animal welfare, including:

- Verbal advice;
- Issue of an Improvement Notice or Breach Cover Letter;
- Further inspections;
- Euthanasia of animals;
- Penalty applied to any Farm Sustainability Payment claimed;
- Prosecution. Any decision by DAERA to submit a file to the Public Prosecution Service is based on evidential tests and public interest considerations, as detailed in DAERA's enforcement policy;
- Application for disqualification from keeping animals.

More than one of these actions may be taken over the course of an investigation into a complaint.

### Inspection

**Satisfactory**  
Outcome of inspection recorded on the Northern Ireland Food Animal Information System.

### Final Outcome of Inspections

The outcomes of inspections, including any subsequent investigations, are not disclosed to the complainant. DAERA publicises all convictions on its website, for a period of 30 days.



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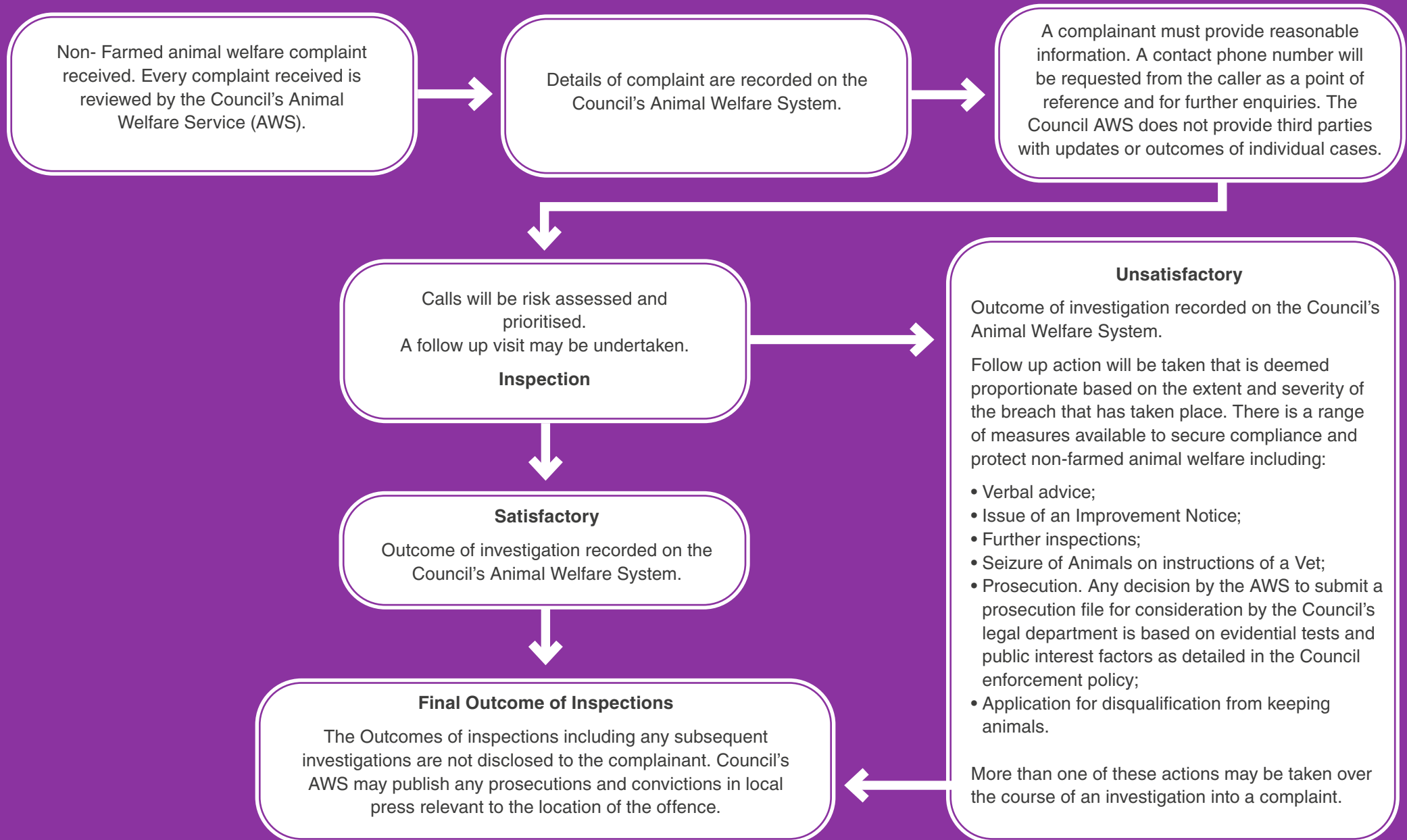
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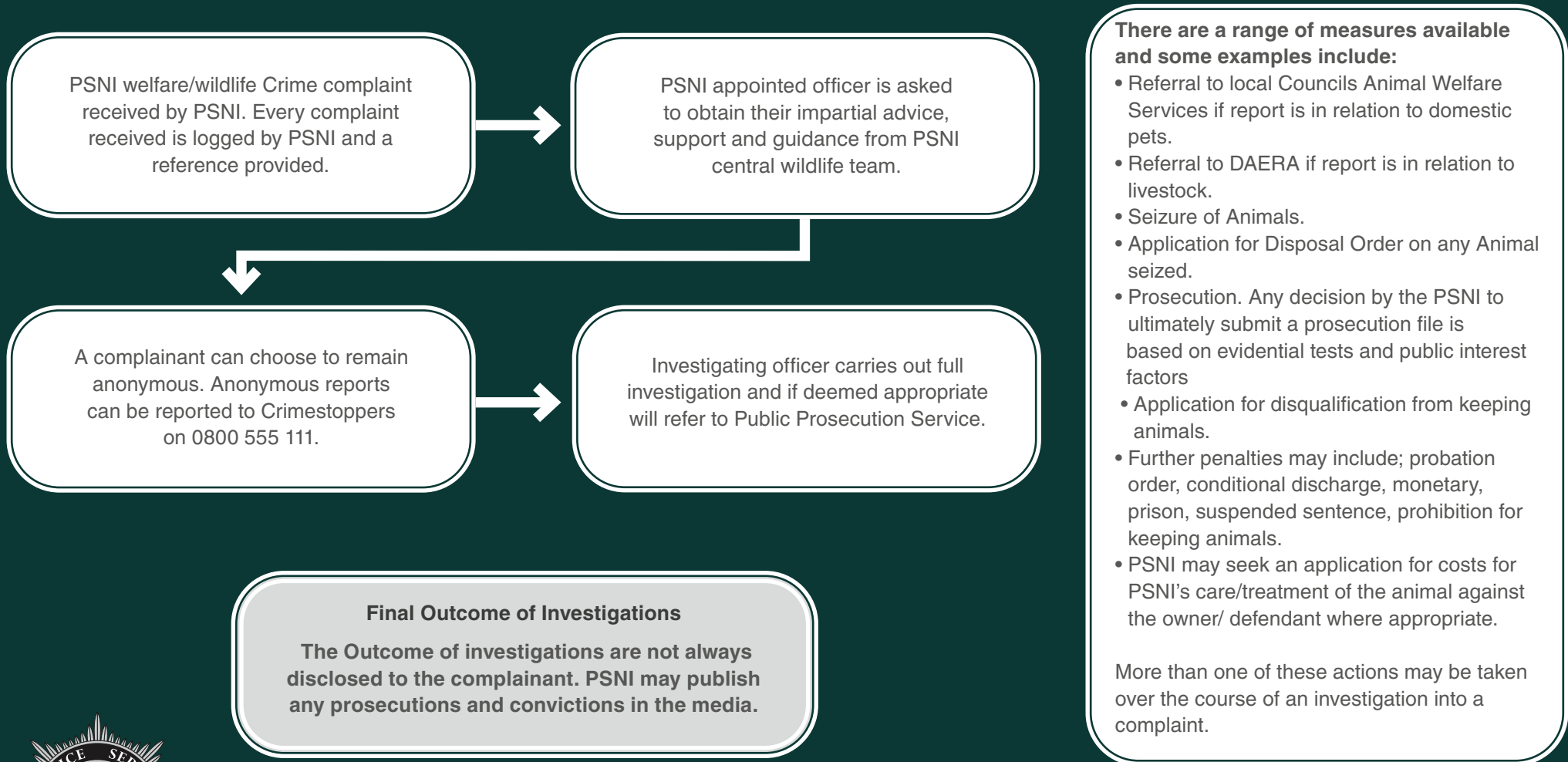
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# NI Councils



# Police Service of NI (PSNI) Central Wildlife/Animal Welfare Team





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