

MULTI AGENCY MINUTES

DATE/TIME	19/06/25 at 10am
MEETING TITLE	DAERA/PSNI/Council Multi-Agency Animal Welfare Forum
VENUE	
LIST OF ATTENDEES	
APOLOGIES	
KEY POINTS DISCUSSED	
welcomed everyone and invited all attendees to introduce themselves. 1. Minutes and action points from last meeting on 22 January 2025 <u>Previous AP1 – DAERA to provide update on DSA at next meeting</u> The current draft of the data sharing agreement has been circulated by DAERA to Councils for review. has forwarded to the 11 Council areas for input from their respective information governance teams. noted that while the draft adequately covers animal welfare, there may be a need to place greater emphasis on dog control. He also suggested expanding the list of shareable information to include dog breeding establishments.	

█████ recommended that the agreement should remain broad in scope, using examples rather than being overly prescriptive.

It was agreed that this will be treated as a live document, allowing for updates over time. However, it was noted that each update will require 12 signatures.

█████ to send █████ a summary of the differences between the current draft and a previous version that included █████

Previous AP2 - DAERA to provide update on expert group at next meeting

A recruitment competition is about to conclude for the appointment of members for the new Expert Advisory Group, to review the regulation of dog breeding and consider the regulation of canine fertility clinics. The group will produce recommendations to inform key stakeholders. The first meeting is due at the start of July and members will be appointed until the end of December.

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Previous AP3 - DAERA to provide a link to the Paws4Thought newsletter

█████ circulated following the last meeting. █████ advised that a more recent version has since been published and confirmed she will circulate this to the group **AP**

Previous AP4 – PSNI to provide update on █████ at next meeting.

█████ advised she does not sit on █████ so is not best placed to give the update. However, █████ is part of Paws for thought in NI.

It was noted that the █████ now seems to encompass the work previously undertaken by █████. This task group is a multi-agency initiative addressing issues across the pet trade, with a particular focus on the illegal puppy trade.

The group includes both statutory and non-statutory bodies. █████ to confirm the full list of current members **AP**. This is to ensure clarity on which organisations are statutory

and to address any concerns regarding the sharing of sensitive information with non-statutory bodies.

AP5 -Councils to review who is receiving DAERA Dog Trading data & update

██████ reported that while address check requests are being fulfilled, the current volume is low. ██████ agreed, noting that portal activity in this area remains quiet. ██████ advised that she continues to receive a small number of requests and typically processes them once a few have accumulated. ██████ inquired whether data is available on the number of address check requests that have been fulfilled.

AP6 – DAERA to Chair, book venue & send invites for next meeting (in person)

AP cleared

2. DAERA Update

Personnel changes

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Animal Welfare Pathway 2025-27 published on 22/05/25

██████ advised the Pathway was launched on 22/05/25 and sets out the range of reforms to be delivered over the remainder of this Assembly's mandate. Reforms include:

- Prohibition of third-party sales of pups and kittens
- Review of dog breeding regulations, including canine fertility clinics
- Microchipping of cats
- Strengthening microchipping requirements
- Responsible dog ownership campaign
- Day care and home boarding
- Review of dog licence fees
- Shock collars
- Regulation of rehoming establishments
- CCTV in slaughterhouses

[REDACTED] branch is working to consolidate all dog-related content on the DAERA website.

[REDACTED] confirmed that the PSNI is willing to assist in promoting any new initiatives, even if they are not directly involved. [REDACTED] is the PSNI's point of contact for this.

LCM - Animal Welfare (Import of dogs, cats and ferrets) Bill

Legislative consent motion (LCM) which will provide the Department with powers to introduce new rules targeting the import of cats and dogs which have been mutilated, such as ear cropping or declawing. The Department is providing the AERA Committee with an oral briefing today.

Consultation on proposed rules for sale and supply of puppies and kittens.

[REDACTED] has requested that the public consultation on potential regulations be extended to September 2025, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

4. Council Update

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

A significant number of animals have been seized since recently, with approximately £10,000 to £15,000 spent on care and collection fees since April.

5. PSNI update

[REDACTED] noted that PSNI welcomes the positive feedback mentioned at today's meeting and is happy to receive by email and pass on comments to relevant work areas management.

A recent conviction was secured in a badger baiting case. The defendant received a one-month custodial sentence suspended for 18 months, a £500 fine and a five-year ban from keeping animals. A dog was seized during the incident and has been rehomed.

is costly, and there is a duty to ratepayers to minimise expenditure. Microchipping cats could increase the number of animals requiring collection.

The PSNI used to have a joint contract with NIEA for 'Dangerous and Wild Animals'.

██████ proposed creating a working group to explore solutions and create an options paper to include the procurement of a shared holding centre for all agencies, consideration of controlled seizures, cost-sharing models and legal and financial viability (with input from the Department of Finance). **AP.** DAERA, PSNI & Councils to consider merit in joint approach to procurement.

DSA between DAERA and PSNI

It was acknowledged that, under Section 6 of the Criminal Justice (Northern Ireland) Order 2003, information can be lawfully shared for the prevention and detection of crime. This provides a legal basis for sharing data where necessary. [REDACTED] commented that, while lawful sharing is possible under existing legislation, it would still be considered good practice to have a formal data sharing agreement in place.

Misdirected information received

█████ highlighted that the Paws For Thought mailbox frequently receives information unrelated to dogs and reports concerning incidents that occurred some time ago.

There was a group discussion around the importance of agencies being mindful of the type and timeliness of information they accept. [REDACTED] advised she is aware that on occasions PSNI have responded to the referring person to redirect them to the correct agency. [REDACTED]

XL Bullies

A recent case was discussed where an XL bully was destroyed after attacking its owner. The incident highlighted ongoing concerns regarding the management and legislation surrounding dangerous dogs [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] emphasised the growing need to review not only breeding legislation but also broader dog-specific legislation. She noted that elected representatives are increasingly approaching councils with concerns about dangerous dog laws.

[REDACTED] raised concerns about the practice of returning dogs to their owners after a period of seizure for administrative checks. She highlighted that time spent in council custody may negatively affect a dog's behaviour. [REDACTED] clarified that interim exemption certificates, which could allow a dog to remain with its owner under certain conditions, are currently not a viable option under existing legislation.

[REDACTED] noted the increasing difficulty faced by council officers in dealing with XL bully incidents. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]. Suggestion made that a practical guide for staff would be beneficial in managing such cases effectively.

[REDACTED] expressed interest in attending DAERA's XL Bully meetings, as they are currently a hot topic for PSNI. [REDACTED] agreed invite could be extended and will raise with chair and group **AP**. Noted that PSNI and councils are meeting to discuss enforcement issues.

Support for staff when handling difficult situations e.g. during instances of uncivil behaviour

DAERA reported a recent incident involving unacceptable behaviour that was particularly challenging for staff and asked about any wellbeing and emotional support services available. Councils confirmed the availability of Inspire Wellbeing Services. Councils have also received in-person Mental Health First Aid training delivered by Mindwise. Signposting to support services and post-incident debriefs are also used. It was noted that [REDACTED] (PSNI) may be able to advise on the availability of Critical Incident Support Services. [REDACTED] expressed interest in joint training opportunities focused on emotional resilience and welcomed collaboration in this area.

■■■■■ highlighted the increasing number of calls involving individuals with mental health issues and complex needs. She extended her thanks to PSNI for their ongoing assistance in these situations.

In relation to physical protection and emergency response tools, ■■■■■

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■■■■■. People Safe ID Badges were discussed as an additional safety measure. These can allow an officer to press a button and call for help in an emergency.

Licensed welfare establishments

Councils have raised concerns about ■■■■■ to handle welfare issues at licensed establishments and an increase in requests for input into enforcement files. There is no current legislative directive for DAERA to enforce welfare laws for non-farmed animals, which is why they refer such cases to Councils. Council suggestions for legislative amendments have been made in the past to address these gaps, but ■■■■■ advised it is not an area being pursued during the current mandate.

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■■■■■ proposed that DAERA officers could be authorised under council powers to allow them to inspect and investigate welfare concerns at licensed establishments, potentially easing the burden on councils. **AP.** Council to request in writing to DAERA for formal consideration by Policy and DSO as necessary.

A proposal to create a working group to include ■■■■■, to explore solutions and create an options paper to include the procurement of a shared holding centre for all agencies, consideration of controlled seizures, cost-sharing models and legal and financial viability (with input from the Department of Finance). If you feel there is merit in this proposal please respond and we will organise a TEAMS meeting to discuss

Next meeting

10.30am on Thursday 6th November 2025 at [REDACTED] with Council to chair. DAERA to book accommodation AP. Done. [REDACTED]

Action points

- [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] [REDACTED]
- AP 2 - [REDACTED] advised that a more recent version of Paws4Thought newsletter is due to be published and confirmed she will circulate this to the group
- AP 3 - [REDACTED] to confirm the full list of current members for [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
- AP 4 - DAERA to Chair, book venue & send invites for next meeting (in person)
AP Cleared.
- AP 5 - [REDACTED] proposed creating a working group to explore solutions and create an options paper to include the procurement of a shared holding centre for all agencies, consideration of controlled seizures, cost-sharing models and legal and financial viability (with input from the Department of Finance)
- AP 6 - [REDACTED] agreed invite could be extended and will raise with chair and group.
- AP 7 - [REDACTED] proposed that DAERA officers could be authorised under council powers to allow them to inspect and investigate welfare concerns at licensed establishments, potentially easing the burden on councils.
- AP 8 - DAERA to book accommodation for the next meeting on 6th November 2025 at [REDACTED]. **Cleared.**
- AP 9 - [REDACTED]
A proposal to create a working group to explore solutions and create an options paper to include the procurement of a shared holding centre for all agencies, consideration of controlled seizures, cost-sharing models and legal and financial viability (with input from the Department of Finance). If you feel there is merit in this proposal please respond and we will organise a TEAMS meeting to discuss