Reference Number: DAERA/26-807

Department of
Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs
An Roinn
Talmhaíochta, Comhshaoil agus Gnóthaí Tuaithe
Depairtment o'
Fairmin, Environment an' Kintra Matthers
www.daera-ni.gov.uk

Veterinary Service Animal Health Group
Information Communications Branch

[redacted]

[redacted]

VSAHG Information Communications Branch
1st Floor
Jubilee House
111 Ballykelly Road
Limavady
BT49 9HP

E-mail: vsinfocommsbranch@daera-ni.gov.uk

09 November 2026

Dear [redacted],

Freedom of Information Act 2000

With regard to your request for information received by the Department on 19 October 2026 which sought the following information:

1. **When did DAERA first become aware of the animal welfare concerns, and in what circumstances were these concerns brought to the Department's attention?**
2. **What action did DAERA take in response to these concerns, and what records exist of any opportunities for earlier intervention, including reasons why earlier action was not taken?**
3. **What are the terms of reference of the independent review, and does it specifically examine when DAERA first became aware of the concerns and whether earlier intervention could have prevented the situation from escalating?**

I can advise that the Department has completed its search and can confirm that it holds the information you requested.

If you are deaf or have a hearing difficulty you can contact the Department via the Next Generation Text Relay Service by dialling 18001 + telephone number.

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The Department has decided not to disclose the information requested in questions 1 and 2, as it is being withheld under section 40(2) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 – Third-party personal data of which you are not the data subject.

The Department has considered this information as part of the assessment set out at **Annex A** and has determined that there is no lawful basis for its disclosure under Freedom of Information (FOI). In reaching this decision, the Department has taken account of the fact that disclosure under FOI is considered to be disclosure to the "world at large", rather than disclosure solely to the requester. Consequently, third party personal data falling within the scope of the request has been withheld.

In addition, the Department has decided to withhold the information requested in questions 1 and 2 under section 30 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 – Investigations and Proceedings. Section 30 is a qualified exemption and, therefore, the Department is required to consider whether the public interest favours maintaining the exemption or disclosing the information. A Public Interest Test has been carried out and is attached at **Annex B**.

In response to question 3, the terms of reference for the independent external review have been published and are available on the DAERA website at Terms of Reference – Independent External Review. The published terms of reference do not specifically state that the review will examine when DAERA first became aware of the concerns or whether earlier intervention could have prevented the situation from escalating.

If you require any clarification, believe that any part of your request has been overlooked, misunderstood or misinterpreted, please contact me in the first instance to see if it is a matter that can be resolved.

If you are unhappy with the manner in which your request for information has been handled or the decision to release/withhold information, you have the right to request a formal review by the Department. If you wish to do so, please contact The Review Section either by e-mailing daera.informationmanager@daera-ni.gov.uk or by post at The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, Data Protection & Information Management Branch, Floor 2, Jubilee House, 111 Ballykelly Road, Ballykelly, Limavady BT49 9HP, within two months from the date of this letter.

If after such an internal review you are still unhappy with the response, you have the right to appeal to the Information Commissioner at Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, CHESHIRE SK9 5AF, who will undertake an independent review of the Department's decision.

Yours sincerely,

[redacted]

Veterinary Service Animal Health Group

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