

Proposed Domestic Abuse (Prevention) (Scotland) Bill

Introduction

A proposal for a Bill to make provision for the prevention of domestic abuse and improve support for those affected, including by requiring: those convicted of offences related to domestic abuse to provide information for a register; use of this information to prevent further harm; use of rehabilitation measures in relation to offences related to domestic abuse; collation and reporting of data related to domestic abuse; and domestic abuse education in schools.

The consultation runs from 29 August 2022 to 20 November 2022

All those wishing to respond to the consultation are strongly encouraged to enter their responses electronically through this survey. This makes collation of responses much simpler and quicker. However, the option also exists of sending in a separate response (in hard copy or by other electronic means such as e-mail), and details of how to do so are included in the member's consultation document.

Questions marked with an asterisk (*) require an answer.

All responses must include a name and contact details. Names will only be published if you give us permission, and contact details are never published – but we may use them to contact you if there is a query about your response. If you do not include a name and/or contact details, we may have to disregard your response.

Please note that you must complete the survey in order for your response to be accepted. If you don't wish to complete the survey in a single session, you can choose "Save and Continue later" at any point. Whilst you have the option to skip particular questions, you must continue to the end of the survey and press "Submit" to have your response fully recorded.

Please ensure you have read the consultation document before responding to any of the questions that follow. In particular, you should read the information contained in the document about how your response will be handled. The consultation document is available here:

[Consultation Document](#)

[Privacy Notice](#)

I confirm that I have read and understood the Privacy Notice which explains how my personal data will be used.

On the previous page we asked you if you are UNDER 12 YEARS old, and you responded Yes to this question.

If this is the case, we will have to contact your parent or guardian for consent.

If you are under 12 years of age, please put your contact details into the textbox. This can be your email address or phone number. We will then contact you and your parents to receive consent.

Otherwise please confirm that you are or are not under 12 years old.

No Response

About you

Please choose whether you are responding as an individual or on behalf of an organisation.
Note: If you choose "individual" and consent to have the response published, it will appear under your own name. If you choose "on behalf of an organisation" and consent to have the response published, it will be published under the organisation's name.

on behalf of an organisation

Which of the following best describes you? (If you are a professional or academic, but not in a subject relevant to the consultation, please choose "Member of the public".)

No Response

Please select the category which best describes your organisation

Third sector (charitable, campaigning, social enterprise, voluntary, non-profit)

Optional: You may wish to explain briefly what the organisation does, its experience and expertise in the subject-matter of the consultation, and how the view expressed in the response was arrived at (e.g. whether it is the view of particular office-holders or has been approved by the membership as a whole).

Dogs Trust is the UK's largest dog welfare charity. We have 21 rehoming centres across the UK; this includes Glasgow and West Calder in Scotland, where we cared for a combined total of 580 dogs in 2021.

We invest substantial resources in information services, community outreach programmes, and education on responsible dog ownership. Since Dogs Trust was founded in 1891 (formerly National Canine Defence League) we have always campaigned on dog welfare issues.

Dogs Trust recognises that pets play an important part in their owners' lives and that pets can often be used as a tool by the perpetrator, with many perpetrators using threats or actual harm to a pet to coerce and control their victim. This includes economic abuse, with perpetrators restricting a survivors' ability to care for their pet such as preventing access to veterinary care and deliberately not feeding a family pet to cause distress and to maintain power and control over them. Perpetrators will use this bond to abuse their victim by physically abusing or threatening to harm the animal, as well as controlling how the owner is able to care for the animal. The Freedom Project is a scheme run by Dogs Trust providing a free and confidential dog fostering service for people escaping domestic abuse. The Freedom Project currently runs in Scotland, Greater London & the South East, East Anglia, the North of England and Wales, and has fostered over 2,200 pets since the service launched in 2004. Last year in Scotland, we placed 36 new dogs on the project, helping 29 families flee domestic abuse.

Given the limited availability of pet fostering services in the UK, and as the majority of refuges are unable to accept pets, owning a pet can often be a barrier for someone needing to flee their home and access refuge/emergency accommodation. A recent survey that Dogs Trust carried out found that more than nine in 10 domestic abuse professionals (95%) said that they are aware of cases where survivors will not leave their home without knowing their pet would also be safe.

Please choose one of the following:

I am content for this response to be published and attributed to me or my organisation

Please provide your Full Name or the name of your organisation. (Only give the name of your organisation if you are submitting a response on its behalf).

(Note: the name will not be published if you have asked for the response to be anonymous or "not for publication". Otherwise this is the name that will be published with your response).

Dogs Trust

Please provide details of a way in which we can contact you if there are queries regarding your response. Email is preferred but you can also provide a postal address or phone number.

We will not publish these details.

[REDACTED]

Aim and approach - Note: All answers to the questions in this section may be published (unless your response is "not for publication").

Q1. Which of the following best expresses your view of the proposed Bill? (Please note that this question is compulsory.)

Partially supportive

Please explain the reasons for your response.

Dogs Trust welcomes the Bill's onus on supporting survivors and improving access to information about a partner's history of domestic abuse. However, we would like also to see recognition of the link between domestic abuse and pet abuse included in the Bill, in line with the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018, which recognises that abusive behaviour within the context of domestic abuse should also include behaviour towards pets, and Question 22 of Police Scotland's Domestic Abuse Questions, which relates to animal and pet abuse.

Safe Lives recognises that "threats to damage the property and cause injury to pets" is one of the characteristics of coercive control (Safe Lives, 2014). Research has also shown acts of animal abuse may be used to coerce, control and intimidate women and children to remain in, or be silent about, their abusive situation (Ponder & Lockwood 2000). Furthermore, a survey by Endeavour, a Domestic Abuse Service, found that 66% of abused women pet owners living in temporary accommodation said their abuser had threatened to harm their pets (Endeavour, 2021).

Dogs Trust is aware that pets play an important part in domestic abuse. As pet abuse is considered when assessing someone's risk of significant harm, Dogs Trust strongly recommends that behaviour towards pets should be recognised within the Bill in order to provide a complete understanding of pet owners experiencing domestic abuse, the challenges they may face, and to better protect and support survivors and their pets. Dogs Trust recommends that any information or allegations involving pets in domestic abuse, should be included as a potential risk or flag within a domestic abuse register. For instance, if a perpetrator has a history of abusing animals or using threats to pets as a tool for coercive control, becoming involved in a new relationship with someone who owns pets could indicate an additional risk for that person and their pets.

Q2. Do you think legislation is required, or are there other ways in which the proposed Bill's aims could be achieved more effectively? Please explain the reasons for your response.

No Response

Domestic Abuse Register

Q3. Which of the following best expresses your view on creating a register of those convicted of domestic abuse related offences?

Partially supportive

Please explain the reasons for your response. Please include any views you have on the list of policy details set out in bold on pages 23 and 24 of the consultation document.

Dogs Trust supports the intention behind the Bill's proposal to introduce a domestic abuse register requiring those placed on it to report certain changes in their circumstances to the police. As administrators of the Freedom Project, we welcome steps to protect survivors. However, if a register was introduced, we strongly believe that this should incorporate the safety element of both survivors and their pets.

In our experience, pet owners have an extremely strong bond with their pet and in many cases will describe their pet as their only support. Given this deep bond and love for their pet, perpetrators will exploit this and use it to their advantage to exert power and control over their partner. One study has found that 71% of pet owners report that their perpetrator had threatened, injured or killed family pets (Ascione et al. 1997).

The link between domestic abuse and pet abuse should be recognised within this proposed legislation to provide further protection to both survivors and their pets. We are aware that many refuges for those fleeing domestic abuse are not able to accept pets. This can lead to owners either being reluctant to leave their homes or forced to leave their beloved pet behind. A Freedom Project survey found that 52% of clients accessing the service disclosed that their pets had been physically abused or threatened with abuse 5. Furthermore, we experienced one case where a woman fled to a refuge in an emergency, leaving her dog behind temporarily but with arrangements in place for the dog to be collected the following day, however in that brief time frame the perpetrator took the dog to a vet and had it euthanased.

In addition to physical abuse, coercive control and emotional abuse, pets are also used within economic abuse. In cases where the survivor has experienced economic abuse, we have seen perpetrators restricting a survivor's ability to provide veterinary care for their pet and deliberately not feeding a family pet to cause distress. This is a form of control, whereby perpetrators will restrict the survivor's ability to care for their pet as a tool to attempt to maintain power and control over them. Pet owners experiencing economic abuse may be unable to pay for vet care themselves, or they may not be allowed to leave the house to attend a veterinary practice. Often dogs accessing the Dogs Trust Freedom Project are in urgent care of veterinary treatment, where perpetrators have refused the survivor to access vital care for their pet.

Given the link between domestic abuse and pet abuse detailed above, we strongly recommend that any register introduced includes details of previous incidents of pet abuse where domestic abuse has taken place. When pets are targeted as a means of domestic abuse, not only will it cause pain and suffering to the animal, but it is also an extremely powerful tool that perpetrators will use to cause distress and fear to the survivor. This is a tool that is not as widely recognised and understood, and therefore the inclusion of pet abuse history in the proposed register is essential for raising awareness of how pets are commonly used within the context of domestic abuse and will ultimately provide better protection for survivors and their pets.

Rehabilitation Measures

Q4. Which of the following best expresses your view of introducing mandatory rehabilitation measures for those convicted of domestic abuse?

Please explain the reasons for your response. Please include any views you have on the list of policy details set out in bold on page 26 of the consultation document.

Although this proposal is outside of our area of expertise, if mandatory rehabilitation measures for those convicted of domestic abuse are introduced, we recommend that these should include measures to

Q4. Which of the following best expresses your view of introducing mandatory rehabilitation measures for those convicted of domestic abuse?

understand animal welfare and animal sentience, given the strong link between domestic abuse and pet abuse outlined above.

Data

Q5. Which of the following best expresses your view of the proposals for data collection and reporting set out in the consultation document in bold on pages 30 and 31?

No Response

Education

Q6. Which of the following best expresses your view of introducing mandatory education in schools on domestic abuse?

Please explain the reasons for your response including any comments on the issues in bold on page 32 of the consultation document.

Although this proposal is outside of our area of expertise, if mandatory education in schools is introduced, we recommend that these should include measures to educate on animal welfare and animal sentience, given the strong link between domestic abuse and pet abuse outlined above.

Financial Implications

Q7. Any new law can have a financial impact which would affect individuals, businesses, the public sector, or others. What financial impact do you think this proposal could have if it became law?

No Response

Equalities

Q8. Any new law can have an impact on different individuals in society, for example as a result of their age, disability, gender re-assignment, marriage and civil partnership status, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation.

What impact could this proposal have on particular people if it became law? If you do not have a view skip to next question.

Please explain the reasons for your answer and if there are any ways you think the proposal could avoid negative impacts on particular people.

No Response

Sustainability

Q9. Any new law can impact on work to protect and enhance the environment, achieve a sustainable economy, and create a strong, healthy, and just society for future generations.

Do you think the proposal could impact in any of these areas? (If you do not have a view then skip to next question)

Please explain the reasons for your answer, including what you think the impact of the proposal could be, and if there are any ways you think the proposal could avoid negative impacts?

No Response

General

Q10. Do you have any other additional comments or suggestions on the proposed Bill (which have not already been covered in any of your responses to earlier questions)?

Dogs Trust recommends implementing a broader remit of case reporting to understand the prevalence of animals involved in domestic abuse cases. Question 22 of Police Scotland's Domestic Abuse Questions asks whether perpetrators have ever mistreated an animal or the family pet, and the Bill should ensure that any history of pet abuse alongside domestic abuse is reported effectively in line with this.

References

1. Safe Lives. 2014. Introduction to Coercive Control. [ONLINE] Available at: http://www.safelives.org.uk/practice_blog/introduction-coercive-control. [Accessed 03 November 2022]
2. Ponder, C. and Lockwood, R. (2000) 'Cruelty to animals and family violence', Training Key, 526, pp.1 - 5. (Published by the International Association of Chief of Police).
3. Endeavour. 2021. Pet Fostering Service Leaflet. [ONLINE]. Available at: https://www.endeavourproject.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Pet_Fostering_Service_leaflet_1June21.pdf. [Accessed 03 November 2022]
4. Ascione, F.R., Weber, C. V. & Wood, D. S. 1997). The abuse of animals and domestic violence: A national survey of shelters for women who are battered. Society & Animals 5(3),205-218.
5. Dogs Trust. Pets and Domestic Abuse - Professionals and Practitioners Survey 2019.