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From the Secretary of State

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Dear Fiona,

Thank you for your email of 12 December to Lord Gardiner on behalf of a number of your constituents about the sale of puppies.

The Government is serious about improving the welfare of dogs in both breeding establishments and at point of sale. One of the ways this can happen is if potential buyers are more aware of what to look for when purchasing a dog or puppy. This is why we have clear advice for potential buyers on the Government's official website. We also work with stakeholders to explore other ways in which such messages can reach those people considering buying a dog or puppy.

We are currently reviewing the laws on the animal activities licensing schemes, including those that regulate the selling of pet animals such as dogs and puppies. Earlier this year, we consulted on a number of proposals including one to apply specific welfare conditions to pet vendors. We have not proposed a ban on third party sellers of pets such as pet shops. A ban is opposed by many of the established animal welfare charities as they fear it could drive the sale of dogs and cats underground. Pet shops are already required to be licensed and in fact many no longer routinely sell either dogs or cats. Local authorities also have the power to restrict which types of pet can be sold at any pet shop on welfare grounds.

We have proposed that modern standards of welfare are applied to all pet shops and other commercial pet vendors even if they are trading on-line or selling from their home. As part of the licensing review, we are looking closely at introducing provisions to clarify the requirement in the regulations and make it consistent with the advice on the Government website, that puppies should not be purchased if they are under eight weeks of age.

We accept that dog breeding needs to be closely regulated. Dog breeding has attracted rogue breeders with little concern for animal welfare because they can make high profits from the sale of just a few puppies. The desire for pedigree dog breeds or specialist cross-breeds runs very high and the cost of acquiring such a dog can run into hundreds, or even thousands of pounds. Uncontrolled dog breeding can also lead to other issues relating to public safety and public nuisance.

Of course there can be unscrupulous people who exploit people's desire for pets to the detriment of animal welfare, but the welfare of all captive animals is protected by the Animal Welfare Act 2006.

If anyone has any concerns about the welfare of animals at a breeding establishment they can report the matter to their local authority or the RSPCA who have the powers to investigate such concerns. There are stiff penalties in place for anyone who flouts the law.

Finally to enhance dog welfare the Government has also made it a requirement for all dogs to be microchipped, under The Microchipping of Dogs (England) Regulations 2015 which came into effect on 6 April this year. Microchipping makes it much easier to reunite a dog and its owner if the dog strays or is lost and this greatly reduces the time dogs spend in kennels.

I hope that this reply is helpful.

Best wishes,

Andrea Leadsom

Andrea Leadsom MP
Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs