

By email

Katrina Godfrey
Permanent Secretary
DAERA

20 October 2023

Dear Katrina

Re: DAERA withdrawal of all funding to Councils for non-farmed animal welfare

Since 2012, Councils have held responsibility for the statutory enforcement of the welfare of animals from the PSNI in respect of non-farmed, domestic animals such as dogs, horses, donkeys etc. This work has been funded by DAERA since 2011.

It is therefore with disappointment and serious concern that I write to you on this topic. It has come to NIPSA's attention that you have issued a notice signalling the withdrawal of all of the £1.25 million public funding for Councils which enabled them to fulfil their statutory duties in regard to domestic animal welfare. We are dismayed at this decision and note that no such decrease has been suggested for farmed animal welfare statutory functions which DAERA directly undertakes – neither would we advocate for such a cut.

The timing of this funding removal is questionable, given the fact that Councils are under severe financial pressure and this decision was taken well after they had already struck their rates for this year. On the surface, £1.25 million appears to be a drop in the ocean as a percentage of DAERA's budget. Yet this essential funding is key to operational requirements of the Councils in exercising their statutory functions and protecting defenceless animals from cruelty and from exploitation by criminals and those who seek to unscrupulously evade the protection that animal welfare laws provide and will fully exploit the inevitable weakening of protection that this funding cut will result in purely for monetary gain. You have removed the entire budget at a critical time of year when vital work to save and protect neglected and abused pets and prosecutions against often repeat criminals, including puppy farmers and smugglers, is most needed. The Christmas market is a driver for criminals to impregnate thousands of dogs to produce puppies, often in the most devastating of settings. How do you expect Councils to continue to fight such profitable illegal trade without any financial provision to do so?

Carmel Gates General Secretary

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The value for money provided by the extremely small team of staff who deliver these statutory functions for Local Government is exemplary. For example, a team of 11 staff responded in 2022/23 to 6820 call outs as a result of reports to animal welfare, conducted 5853 formal investigations on these cases and made 8552 visits including revisits where animal suffering and cruelty was reported.

The devastating impact of this funding cut is already damaging the staffing numbers, in that Councils cannot afford to fill at last 2 vacancies in an already extremely small team which covers all of NI.

The previous Minister of DAERA, Mr Edwin Poots, was instrumental in the introduction of a campaign entitled “Paws for Thought” during his tenure, which specifically targeted illegal breeders from NI and the ROI who were using ports at Belfast and Larne for the illegal transportation of puppies to Great Britain. This campaign resulted in the successful closure of the main avenues used to access this market. Such a valuable public service is severely curtailed by this funding cut to Councils, particularly as no prior warning had been given to enable Councils to factor in the expenditure requirements when rate setting. I am therefore sharing this correspondence with Mr Poots as well as the previous Minister for Justice, Mrs Naomi Long, calling for their considered intervention on the funding cut.

NIPSA calls upon DAERA to rethink this funding withdrawal and immediately reinstate the funding to Councils which is undoubtedly required to provide this invaluable service, which we believe has the full backing of, and is an emotive issue for, the general public and interested animal welfare organisations, many of whom have already expressed their horror about this funding dessimation via the media.

I look forward to hearing from you Katrina.

Yours sincerely



Kim Graham
NIPSA Assistant Secretary