GUIDANCE FOR COMPANION ANIMAL RESCUE & REHOMING ORGANISATIONS

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NEWC NATIONAL EQUINE WELFARE COUNCIL

CFSG Canine & Feline Sector Group

This document provides guidance for rescue, rehoming centres and organisations that are working during the Covid-19 crisis.

The government has already permitted companion animal rescue and rehoming organisations to remain open throughout the crisis to provide for the ongoing needs of animals in their care. This guidance has now been updated to reflect changes to the restrictions imposed on companion animal rescue and rehoming organisations operating in England by the Government following the publication of its **Recovery Strategy**.

This guidance is intended for rescue, rehoming centres and organisations that handle any or all companion animal species, including but not limited to dogs, cats, small furries and equines but not including wildlife. References to staff can be extended to include volunteers and other personnel involved in the operation of the rescue.

The guidance is in five sections, covering:

- The admission (intake) of animals into a rescue environment;

- The assessment of behaviour of animals whilst in a rescue environment;

- The care of animals whilst in a rescue environment; veterinary care of animals in a rescue environment or to be rehomed;

- The rehoming (adoption) of animals, including temporary placement in a foster home (or equivalent).

Individual rescue centres and organisations should consider this guidance in the context of their operations and in the context of government advice and instructions, including how employers can keep their staff and workplaces safe. Stay alert to the evolving scale of the virus pandemic and ensure you can respond quickly in the event of the Government raising the Covid-19 Alert Level, and corresponding changes to restrictions and/or guidance.

ADMISSIONS (INTAKE)
– covering animals coming into a rescue environment

- Only admit animals you have the skills and resource to care for. Ensure you have enough staff, allowing for possible sickness and holiday absence. Avoid overcrowding in your rescue centre. You may wish to prioritise animals whose welfare is significantly compromised or at imminent risk.

- If an animal owner is seeking only temporary care for their animal, consider referring them to boarding facilities instead or organisations which offer assistance such as the **Cinnamon Trust**. You may need to provide support over a longer term to enable other owners who are in difficulty to help them keep their animal.

- Reduce intake demand by supporting owners to keep their animals in the home environment where possible and work collaboratively with your Local Authorities and local rescues so you can share the burden between you. Consider

taking in only those Local Authority stray dogs that have already served their statutory stray days.

- If you come across a large case of multiple animals in crisis, you don't need to face it alone. Get in touch with the rescue sector groups (see further information, below), who may be able to provide support and help coordinate a response.

- Owners may travel to a rescue centre to relinquish an animal. This should be by appointment only.

- Owners should call the rescue centre first to discuss the best course of action and to ensure they have space. By telephoning ahead of the owner's visit, you should collect as much information about the animal as you require and complete any administration associated with the relinquishment.

- When brought to the rescue, the animal should be accompanied by no more than two people. Only one person should get out of the vehicle on arrival at the rescue and only when called forward. The relinquishment should take place in a secure, outdoor space or a large, well-ventilated room. Keep the amount of time the owner spends at your centre to a minimum.

- Alternatively, you may collect the animal. Ensure social distancing with any member of the public and adequate hygiene precautions are in place for your staff. Your staff or licensed transporters engaged to collect an animal should be easily identifiable with letters of authority and in uniform if provided.

- Plan how to carry out the collection safely. Book an appointment date and time. Collect the animal in a secure way which maintains at least a two-metre distance between people. Collect the animal from a large, well-ventilated room or a secure, outdoor space. Minimise touching the animal.

- Additionally, if collecting an animal from a coronavirus-positive person or household, you should wear appropriate protective equipment. This equipment should be thoroughly cleaned or disposed of appropriately following the collection and you should wash your hands for 20 seconds using soap and water.

- Refer to the **CFSG handover protocol** (or **NEWC advice for Equines**). for detailed advice on how to manage the handover of an animal safely.

- In all cases assess the animal's fitness to travel and identify any health and behaviour needs to inform the most appropriate care for the animal and ensure you can meet those needs. This may include consideration of euthanasia as a welfare outcome for animals with particularly challenging needs.

- When the animal has arrived at your centre, avoid it contacting other animals, wipe it down with an animal-safe cloth, if appropriate for the species, and dispose of it properly afterwards. If unable to do this, and for all animals arriving from a coronavirus-positive household, quarantine for three days (72 hours) and during this time the animal should only be handled by staff wearing appropriate protection. Those animals should be handled after all other animals. Any holding areas should be cleaned and disinfected after use.

- All leads, collars, carriers and other equipment that has had contact with the animal should be cleaned with soap and water, disinfected and left to dry.

- Any bedding such as wood shavings should be double bagged and put into general waste.

- Fully clean and disinfect all relevant parts of the vehicle used to transport the animal. This will include the inside of the vehicle (e.g. steering wheel, gear stick etc), the animal travel area and some external areas (e.g. door handles) as well as keys.

ASSESSMENT OF BEHAVIOUR OF ANIMALS IN THE RESCUE ENVIRONMENT

- Assessment of behaviour remains important to avoid the risk of harm to other animals and people, as well as the reputational damage to the sector if animals are not rehomed safely and responsibly. Assessment also helps to reduce the number of animals returned to rescues and helps ensure animals are matched to homes that are likely to be able to meet their specific needs over the long-term.

- Before each animal enters your care, and where possible, take a detailed history of its current environment and personal preferences over the phone, email, webform etc. This can be helpfully supplemented with video footage of the animal in its current environment.

- Assess each animal's behavioural response to the various situations you place them in. Throughout your assessments, consider how the safety of your staff can be maintained. Where it is necessary to have more than one person involved in the assessment of an animal's behaviour ensure social distancing is maintained and the assessment is carried out in an outdoor space or a large, well-ventilated room.

- Consider how animal handlers should respond to an incident in which social distancing has to be temporarily breached e.g. to separate two dogs. In such an event, minimise the amount of time that handlers spend within two metres of one another and immediately afterwards, both handlers should wash their hands for 20 seconds using soap and water.

- Consider using equipment such as long lines to help maintain social distancing and equipment such as harnesses to maintain greater control over an animal.

- Leads, collars, training aids and equipment should be washed and disinfected between each handler.

CARE OF AN ANIMAL IN A RESCUE ENVIRONMENT

Focus on maintaining at least minimum legislative welfare standards for your animals. You may need to significantly amend your daily routines, including the amount of exercise or handling you can provide, to reflect your staff availability.

- All relevant protocols and care information (e.g. diet sheets) for all species should be readily available to all staff, including those who may not be as familiar as others.

- Amend staff rotas to enable social distancing requirements to be met and reduce the risk of infection between staff. Consider dividing staff into multiple teams that have no contact to ensure some staff are always available.

- Maintain strong biosecurity measures. Ensure strict cleaning protocols are in place using appropriate disinfectants and animal housing and staff areas are well ventilated.

- Consider how you can enhance environmental enrichment for your animals, as a key measure to manage stress and frustration.

- If appropriate, place animals in temporary foster care until they can be rehomed.

VETERINARY CARE OF ANIMALS IN A RESCUE ENVIRONMENT OR BEING REHOMED

- As is normal, check all animals at the point of intake to evaluate for disease and vaccination requirements. Isolate or quarantine animals as required.

- Veterinary practices may be able to offer general health checks, neutering and vaccination if a disease and public health assessment by the vet shows it to be appropriate and social distancing can be maintained. The establishment's veterinary practice should be contacted as the risk of a visit by a vet and veterinary nurse may be less of a public health risk than individual animals being taken to the practice.

- In view of the possible non-availability of primary vaccination, biosecurity should be enhanced with increased use of hand gels and/or hand washing between dealing with each animal.

- Take care when rehoming un-neutered animals to homes with an existing animal. Neutering may be possible if a risk assessment of the public health and animal welfare implications by the vet shows it to be appropriate.

- It may not be appropriate to rehome to households with existing animals as there will be no opportunity to ensure compatibility by meeting on neutral ground.

- Explore the use of telemedicine and remote prescribing if a site visit from your vet isn't possible.

- Vets are moving towards getting back to routine work. Plan any visits carefully to meet social distancing requirements.

- When rehoming, accurately record any outstanding vet procedures including vaccinations for each animal, with a process for follow up.

- Check with your insurance partner about requirements for veterinary care prior to rehoming in order to validate insurance cover notes.

- Contact other local rescues if your usual veterinary practice is not available to support you.

- Animals with ongoing complex veterinary issues should not generally be considered for rehoming.

- Consider your policy on euthanasia with your vet. This may need to be reviewed in line with your ability to manage animals on site, the intake demand you may face and the availability of veterinary support.

- Refer to the latest **RCVS, BVA, BSVA** and **BEVA** guidance during the coronavirus pandemic. The vets of the major organisations have provided further guidance that can be found **here**.

🏠 **REHOMING – covering the rehoming/adoption of animals from centres or directly from one home to another and including the temporary placement of animals in the care of a home (also known as fostering)**

- Where possible, rehoming should be carried out without members of the public visiting rescue centres. Consider use of digital technology to support rehoming, for example online rehoming applications, online galleries of animals available for rehoming, virtual home checks and video introductions of animals to potential new owners.

- Members of the public may visit rescue centres, by appointment, for the purpose of meeting an animal with a view to rehoming it, or to collect an animal that they have already arranged to rehome. Where possible, viewing and collection should be combined in one visit.

- Introductions between members of the public and animals at rescue centres should take place in secure, outdoor spaces or in large, well-ventilated indoor areas. Limit the number of people meeting an animal at any one time in order to maintain social distancing.

- Where possible, you or a licensed transporter should deliver animals to their new homes. Centre staff, volunteers or licensed transporters engaged to deliver an animal should be easily identifiable with letters of authority and in uniform if provided.

- Prioritise local rehoming opportunities to avoid long journeys where possible.

- Plan ahead with the animal's new owner or foster carer and book the date and time for delivery. Deliver the animal in a secure way and, where the new owner/ fosterer has not met the animal previously, ensure that provision is in place to support a settling in period. Always maintain social distancing and avoid entering a person's home. Use the **CFSG handover protocol** (or **NEWC advice for Equines**).

- Do not rehome an animal to a household in which one or more member is currently self-isolating due to symptoms of coronavirus – this will need to be verified with the household.

- Rehome animals only when the new owner/s can meet your suitability criteria and where the welfare needs of the animal will be met, including when the new owner/s return to their usual lifestyle or in the unfortunate event of the new owner becoming ill. The physical suitability of a home can be assessed using **Google Earth** and virtual tours like **WhatsApp**, **Zoom** and photos or videos of the setup at home.

- Encourage new owners to purchase everything they need in terms of equipment for the animal and a reasonable supply of food and bedding (e.g. to cover a period of at least 14 days if they need to isolate themselves) before they get an animal.

- Keep in touch with the new owner/s. Any post-rehoming home visits should be carried out in a secure way which maintains at least a two-metre distance between people. Meet the animal in a large, well-ventilated room or a secure, outdoor space. Minimise touching the animal.

- If appropriate, consider short-term fostering as a means of ensuring the suitability of the match between an animal and its new owner/s prior to rehoming.

- Consider the impact of government restrictions on your rehoming criteria. In the event of an unsuccessful adoption or foster, the animal will need to be collected or it can be returned to the rescue centre by appointment, in accordance with the admissions guidance, above.

- Ensure that new owners/fosterers can access emergency veterinary care while government restrictions are in place.

SOURCES OF FURTHER INFORMATION, ADVICE AND SUPPORT

▶ **Government guidance** to help employers, employees and the self-employed understand how to work safely during the coronavirus pandemic

▶ **Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs** advice on coronavirus

MAJOR ANIMAL RESCUE ORGANISATIONS
– many offering further advice on animal care during the coronavirus pandemic

Membership bodies and sector groups offering advice and support, include:

▶ **Canine and Feline Sector Group**
Provides a range of advice, including for pet owners and pet businesses.

▶ **Association of Dogs and Cats Homes**
Provides **Minimum Welfare and Operational Standards** for dog and cat rescue organisations, a range of **advice** on working during the coronavirus pandemic and a **directory of member organisations** across the British Isles.

▶ **National Equine Welfare Council**
Provides a range of coronavirus guidance and a **directory of members** by region.

▶ **Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons Knowledge**
Provides clinical evidence, advice for professionals and employers, and infection control resources related to coronavirus

▶ **British Veterinary Association**
Provides guidance for veterinary practices in assessing emergency and urgent care during the coronavirus pandemic.

▶ **British Small Animal Veterinary Association**
Provides guidance to support the veterinary profession during the COVID-19 outbreak, sharing updates and information to support vets and RVNs in practice as well as pet owners.