

<b>Committee(s):</b>	<b>Date(s):</b>
Port Health & Environmental Services	16 September 2014
<b>Subject:</b> The increase in illegally imported dogs and cats dealt with by the Animal Health and Welfare Team	<b>Public</b>
<b>Report of:</b> Director of Markets & Consumer Protection	<b>For Decision</b>
<p><b>Summary</b></p> <p>The purpose of this report is to provide information to Members regarding the work carried out by City Corporation officers in dealing with illegally imported dogs and cats as part of their statutory duties under the Animal Health Act, and the increase in workload and costs incurred since the changes to the Regulations on 1 January 2012.</p> <p>Proposals are provided on actions that could be taken to strengthen controls at the borders, which would reduce the costs to Animal Health Authorities such as the City Corporation, as they would not need to detain the animals inland.</p> <p><b>Recommendation(s)</b></p> <p>Members are asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Note the continuing problem will the illegal importation of pets, and the increasing costs of enforcement</li> <li>• Endorse the proposals contained in paragraphs 30 – 35, and agree to officers pursuing the suggestions with government departments and agencies.</li> </ul>	

## Main Report

### Background

1. The aim of this Report is to alert Members to the growing problem of illegally imported puppies, to outline actions being taken with Defra and to explain the line being taken by City Officers in seeking improved controls.
2. The Animal Health Act 1981 places a statutory duty on the City of London Corporation with regards to imported animals for the whole of the Greater London Area. Officers from the Animal Health and Welfare team investigate all

reports of suspected illegally imported animals into Greater London. The City Corporation also has contracts to investigate any suspect illegal landings in the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead, Bracknell Forest Borough Council and Reading Borough Council.

3. In 1999 the UK ran a pilot trial allowing dogs and cats arriving from Europe to be exempt from quarantine if they met strict requirements. They were required to be identified by a microchip and then vaccinated against rabies. They were then required to have a blood sample taken, and six months after a satisfactory test result could enter the UK without undergoing a six month quarantine period in quarantine kennels on arrival in the U.K. Prior to arrival they also had to be treated for ticks and the tapeworm, *Echinococcus multilocularis*.
4. The EU adopted the UK trial and introduced the Pet Travel Scheme in legislation in 2003. The legislation allowed for certain derogations for the U.K., Ireland, Malta, Finland and Sweden. Thus, the UK still used the six months quarantine for 'higher risk' countries, those 'unlisted' in the EU regulations.
5. On 1 January 2012 the UK harmonised with the rest of the EU which then allowed dogs and cats that complied with the scheme to enter the UK without quarantine from any country in the world. Dog and cats entering the UK from Europe and 'listed' third countries could do so after being identified by a microchip and vaccinated against rabies and then waiting 21 days before entering the UK. A dog or cat arriving from an 'unlisted' third country has additional requirements of receiving a blood test no sooner than 30 days after the rabies vaccination and then waiting 3 months (if the blood test shows a titre higher than 0.5IU/ml) before entry – a total of four months.
6. The requirement for tick treatment was abandoned as the ticks it was protecting against have been found in the Member States that previously required the treatment. The *Echinococcus multilocularis* treatment is continued for the UK, Malta, Ireland and Finland. (Sweden found the tapeworm in its territory in 2011 and so can no longer require the treatment).
7. In 2011, prior to harmonisation of the legislation on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2012, nationally, 127 dogs were identified as having been illegally imported into the UK.
8. In 2010 the City Corporation's Animal Health and Welfare Team dealt with 17 illegal cases (consignments that can comprise more than one animal) with 19 animals being detained. This increased in 2011 to 20 illegal cases, which led to 21 animals being detained.

9. After harmonisation there was a large increase in the reported numbers of animals, mainly puppies, entering the UK in non-compliance with the regulations, hence illegally. Nationally, during 2012, 417 dogs and cats that had entered the UK illegally were put into quarantine. This increased to 459 in 2013.
10. In 2012 the Animal Health and Welfare Team dealt with 38 cases, leading to the detention of 78 animals, a rise of 90% in cases, but an increase of 350% in the number of animals detained.
11. In 2013 the Team investigated 45 cases resulting in 49 animals being detained.

### **Current Position**

12. Until the end of May 2014, 29 animals had been detained, and there is likely to be an overall increase on 2013's workload of around 50%.
13. Due to the concerns expressed to Defra and the Animal Health and Veterinary Laboratories Agency (AHVLA) by City Corporation Officers and the Local Authorities' National Animal Health and Welfare Panel, (on which an Officer sits), AHVLA has introduced a reporting system so that data can be gathered. This data is used to enable the Chief Veterinary Officer for England to write to countries where their vets or processes are not consistent with the legislation. The information passed on by Officers has resulted in several letters and an approach to the U.S. Government via the U.S. Embassy regarding issues the Corporation Officers have raised.
14. Defra have also implemented a working group to look at the problem. A Corporation officer has been invited to be on this working group.
15. The Officer's investigations reveal that most of the trade comes through Dover and on Eurotunnel. There are two types of trade: firstly, the puppy trade from Eastern Europe. It is this trade that causes most problems in London. Secondly, there is also a trade in 'rescue' dogs, mostly from Romania.
16. The puppy trade is predominantly run by Eastern Europeans. Hungary and Lithuania are currently the countries that are supplying the most puppies, but this can change and most Eastern European countries are involved to a degree.

17. The 'rescue' dog trade is predominantly run by UK nationals who drive to Romania to collect stray dogs and bring them back to the UK for fostering, for a 'fee' of around £250. The Corporation's Officers have had minimal involvement with this, and AHVLA and the local authorities have worked hard to make most of these organisations compliant with the rules. This has been made easier as they are dealing with organisations based in this country.
18. The puppies that are supplied from Eastern Europe are usually non-compliant as they are too young to have been vaccinated so do not meet the requirements of the Pet Travel Scheme, hence they also have fraudulent passports.
19. Nearly 100% of all the puppies reported to the Corporation's Officers come from veterinary practices. The puppies have been bought off the internet and when the purchaser takes the puppy to their vet it is then that the vet realises the puppy is not compliant with the regulations and informs Animal Health.
20. Therefore, it is the end user from whom the dog is detained and not the dealer who imported the animal. As a result, the number of prosecutions taken is still fairly low, as it is only when the actual importers are traced and evidence found that a prosecution can be put forward.
21. To raise public awareness of the issues of buying puppies from the internet, the Animal Health and Welfare Team have taken part in the following documentaries, The BBC "Fake Britain", Channel 4 "Dispatches" and ITV "Tonight". Officers also sit on the Pet Advertising Advice Group (PAAG), which in 2013 had a set of standard conditions approved and signed by Lord de Mauley, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for natural environment and science, who has visited the Heathrow Animal Reception Centre. Officers have spoken at various events including the British Small Animal Veterinary Association Congress.

## **Implications**

22. The cost of fulfilling statutory duties in relation to the (illegal) import of animals in 2013 was circa £36,000, i.e. an average of £800 for each of the 45 cases. This includes all costs such as transport and out-of-hours charges.
23. 2014 is on target to cost approximately 50% more than 2013.
24. The cost of quarantine for those dogs where the owner has disappeared was only £2000 in 2013. This is mainly down to the efforts of the officers and their forcefulness in dealing with the offenders and innovative solutions to re-homing abandoned animals.

25. As long as the Eastern European puppies are cheaper than home produced puppies, it seems unlikely that there will be a diminishing of the problem of non-compliant animals entering the UK and the cost, nationwide, for all local authorities is a significant one.

### **Next steps**

26. There is new EU legislation being implemented on 29 December 2014 which tightens up some aspects of the Pet Travel Scheme but it will not stop the trade. For instance, it specifies that a puppy/kitten must be at least 12 weeks old at vaccination. Thus, following the 21 day wait, prior to import, the animal would be around 15 weeks old. Most buyers of puppies want them at 8 weeks of age.
27. It is hoped that the new working group Defra are setting up will be able to influence Ministers to have a dialogue with their colleagues in the source countries.
28. The government recently announced the creation of the Animal and Plant Health Agency which will begin on 1 October 2014. Its aim is to equip the government better to prevent the spread of animal and plant diseases, and to respond to emergencies. The Chief Executive of the new agency is due to visit the Heathrow Animal Reception Centre on 4 September.

### **Proposals**

29. In order to tackle this issue, there are actions that could be taken to improve controls, and reduce costs to Animal Health Authorities, as they would not need to detain animals inland. The proposals are outlined below and it is recommended that officers pursue the suggestions with government departments and agencies.
30. As the vast majority of non-compliant animals are entering the EU via the Dover ferries and Eurotunnel, natural pinch points, it would seem eminently sensible that government use these as points of first control. Currently ferry and Eurotunnel staff only check what is presented to them so it is very easy for unscrupulous people to avoid the checks.
31. There is no formal agreement between Border Force and AHVLA with regards this issue and no organised intelligence gathering. Both should be addressed as a matter of urgency.
32. Some of the illegally imported animals that have been dealt with in London have undergone a check by ferry staff who have not noticed that the puppies are too young to comply with the regulations. Government should ensure that the pets checkers are properly competent to be able to carry out checks to ensure compliance with all parts of the regulations. There is a legal basis for this arrangement.

33. The two most relevant pieces of legislation are due to be reviewed soon. It is suggested that offences be included that are relevant to the current issues present with penalties commensurate to the possible outcome.
34. Defra have been giving out mixed messages. On the one hand their line appears to be that the risk of the introduction of rabies to the UK is extremely low, but on the other hand they want Local Authorities to enforce the legislation as a priority and are critical of those that do not. It is suggested that Defra would present a consistent message if they insist Local Authorities enforce the regulations.
35. Any non-compliant dogs or cats that enter the U.K. through Dover or the Tunnel will also have been non-compliant in France. It seems that the ferry companies, Eurotunnel and AHVLA do not report such non-compliance to the French authorities. It is suggested that the government should seek French co-operation in this matter.

## **Conclusion**

36. Illegal importation of pets, particularly puppies, is a continuing and growing problem for the City Corporation, with costs increasing year on year. Controls could be improved at borders, so the suggested changes should be proposed to government departments and agencies.

## **Robert Quest**

Assistant Director - (Animal Health)

T: 020 7332 2401

E: [Robert.quest@cityoflondon.gov.uk](mailto:Robert.quest@cityoflondon.gov.uk)