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Consultation on Code of Practice for the Welfare of Cats

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Preface

Under the Animal Welfare Act 2006 (“the Act”), if you own or are responsible, whether on a permanent or temporary basis, for an animal you have a legal duty to take reasonable steps to ensure its welfare needs are met. This code explains what you need to do to meet the standard of care the law requires. If you are a parent or guardian of a child less than 16 years old, you are responsible for any animal that child is in charge of or owns.

Breach of a provision of this code is not an offence in itself but, if proceedings are brought against you for a welfare offence under the Act, the court may take into account the extent to which you have complied with the code in deciding whether you have committed an offence or have met the required standard of care. You should not cause any unnecessary suffering to your animal; this could constitute a serious offence under the Act.

You will also find reference in the code to ‘pet care specialists’. These are people who, through qualification or experience, can provide expert advice on welfare and some aspects of health for one or more types of pet animal. Examples are animal behaviourists, veterinary nurses and dedicated welfare organisations. Owners should look to their veterinary surgeon for advice on their animal’s health and later refer to pet care specialists.

To find out more about the Animal Welfare Act 2006 and details of your responsibilities under it, see Annex 1 at the end of this code. For further sources of information, see Annex 2.

You should be aware that the legislation cited in the code and in Annex 1 is correct at the date of issue but may be subject to subsequent change.

This preface is not part of the code but is intended to explain its purpose and broad aims. Similarly Annex 1, which provides information on the relevant legal requirements and Annex 2, which lists some additional sources of information, are not part of the code.

Introduction

Owning and caring for a pet is great fun and very rewarding, but it is also a big responsibility and a long-term financial and caring commitment. You control your pet's lifestyle; it is your responsibility to make sure that its needs are met, whatever the circumstances. The law requires that you must take reasonable steps to ensure that it:

- Has a suitable environment to live in;
- Has a healthy diet;
- Is able to behave normally;
- Has appropriate company;
- Is protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease

These are explained in more detail in sections 1-5 of this code. For further advice, speak to your veterinary surgeon or a pet care specialist. Other sources of information are listed in Annex 2.

Every animal is different and as you get to know your pet, you will recognise familiar characteristics. It is important that you are able to notice any changes in behaviour, as these might indicate that your pet is distressed, ill, or is not having its needs met in some other way.

This code of practice is issued under section 14 of the Animal Welfare Act 2006 (the "Act"). This code applies in England only and has been issued by the Secretary of State. The purpose of this Code of Practice is to provide advice on how to meet the needs of your cat to the extent required by good practice under section 9 of the Act. Serious failure to meet such needs could also constitute an offence of unreasonable suffering under section 4 of the Act. It covers all cats for which a person is responsible.

This code of practice is split into two parts. Part 1 is a summary of the details contained in the main Code of Practice.

It is your responsibility to read the complete Code of Practice to fully understand your cat's welfare needs and what the law requires you to do.

Part 1 - Summary of the Code of Practice for the Welfare of Cats

Section 1 – Environment

Make sure your cat has a suitable place to live

Sleeping and resting

You should provide your cat with a comfortable, dry, draught-free resting area to which it has constant access and where it will feel safe.

Cats need opportunities to climb and jump, such as a simple 'platform' type bed or safe access to shelves and the tops of cupboards

Cats that are not very tame, such as some farm cats, may prefer to live outdoors in more basic shelter but you still need to look after them

Hazards

Ensure your cat is kept away from potentially harmful substances

Travel

Make sure your cat is transported safely

Cats should not be left unattended in a vehicle. In warm weather, **this can be life threatening**

Going to the toilet

Your cat should have somewhere suitable to go to the toilet. This can be an indoor tray with some suitable material, such as cat litter or your cat may prefer to go outside.

In multi-cat households there should be at least one litter tray provided per cat.

Section 2 – Diet

Make sure your cat has a balanced diet that meets its nutritional needs

Your cat must have access to fresh clean water at all times

How often to feed your cat

Your cat should eat regularly and must be fed at least once a day.

Cats are true carnivores and eat meat. They cannot be vegetarians

Healthy Weight

Your cat should not be too fat or too thin. You can assess your cat's weight by gently seeing if you can feel its ribs; if they are hard to find it may be overweight. If the ribs and backbone are prominent, then your cat may be underweight and ill. If in doubt, ask your veterinary surgeon whether your cat is within its correct weight range. Obesity is a serious welfare concern as it can lead to the development of significant health conditions such as diabetes.

Other dietary needs

Some cats have different dietary needs; your veterinary surgeon is the best person to advise you about the care of your cat in these circumstances

Section 3 – Behaviour

Your cat should be able to behave normally

Typical behaviours

Behaviour such as hunting is important to cats. You can fulfil this need with play using appropriate toys. Behaviour such as scratching or claw conditioning is normal; you can buy a scratching post of the correct type from most pet shops.

Exercise

Make sure your cat has opportunities to exercise each day to stay fit and healthy. If it does not go outside, provide suitable indoor activities to keep your cat active.

Signs of Stress

Watch your cat closely for signs of stress or changes in behaviour.

Section 4 – Company

Make sure your cat's social needs are met

Socialisation

Notice how your cat reacts to other cats, pets or people, and make sure that it is able to avoid them if it wants to. It should be remembered that cats are naturally solitary animals.

Relations with other animals and people

Socialisation with people, cats and other animals, and getting used to common noises, is an essential part of early learning. The important period of learning is from approximately 2 weeks to 7 weeks of age, but can continue for a lot longer

Responsible persons should ensure that cats in their care are handled properly and are not stressed or harmed by other people, children or animals

Dogs should be introduced to cats very carefully; the dog should be held safely on a lead at first so that it cannot chase the cat

When you are away from home

You must arrange for your cat's needs to be met if you are away from home

Number of Animals

It is best not to keep too many cats together, especially if they do not have access to the outside. Cats are by nature solitary animals so living in a multi-cat household could be very stressful for them. Multi-cat households can also increase the risk of infectious disease spread. Large numbers of animals need a great deal of care and you should not keep a large number of cats if you cannot meet their welfare needs.

Section 5 – Health & Welfare

You must ensure your cat is in good health

Health care

You should regularly examine your cat for signs of injury and illness. You must ensure your cat is treated promptly by a veterinary surgeon if it is injured or ill. Your cat's veterinary surgeon will be able to advise you about routine health care, such as vaccination, and parasite control (e.g. fleas and worms), as well as any health problems it may have

Grooming

You should ensure that your cat's coat is properly groomed. A pet care specialist may be able to advise you about coat care

Identification

Your cat should be identifiable. Cats are generally identified by two methods to help trace their owner should they become lost: microchipping; or wearing a correctly fitted quick release collar that has the cat owner's contact details

Neutering

You should consider having your cat neutered to prevent the birth of unwanted kittens.

Part 2 - Code of Practice for the Welfare of Cats

Section 1: Environment

Its need for a suitable environment (Section 9(a) of the Act)

- 1.1 This section offers guidance on providing your cat with a suitable place to live.

Sleeping and resting

- 1.2. Different cats will have different needs. Cats that are not very tame, such as some farm cats, may prefer to live outdoors in more basic shelter. Cats that are used to being inside are more likely to prefer the warmth and comfort of indoors.

Cats need:

- a sleeping/resting area that is comfortable, dry and draught-free. In multi-cat households there should be sufficient separate places for each cat to rest;
- areas to hide, such as an enclosed bed or a box, although some cats will prefer to hide under a chair or under your bed; and
- opportunities to climb and jump, such as a simple 'platform' type bed or safe access to shelves and the tops of cupboards.

Cats need to rest/sleep for long periods. If cats cannot find somewhere they feel safe to rest, their sleep may be disrupted and this can affect their health.

Hygiene

- 1.3 Part of providing a suitable environment is making sure that it is safe, clean and hygienic.

Hazards

- 1.4 Cats usually avoid eating things that are harmful. There are some circumstances, however, where their natural behaviour or curiosity will lead them to eat things that may be poisonous to them. Some examples are when:
- indoor cats that do not have much to do, or inquisitive kittens, investigate potentially poisonous plants that they would normally ignore. Such plants should be avoided or placed where your cat cannot reach them. Make sure that any large plants are in a stable container that cannot be knocked over;
 - your cat cleans poisonous substances from its fur. Because cats are meticulously clean animals that regularly groom, they will try to remove any substances that soil their coat. They are therefore in danger of eating poisons such as

paints, weedkillers, lily pollen etc. You should ensure that any potentially poisonous substances are stored safely and any spills mopped up carefully. You should clean any unknown or potentially dangerous substances off your cat's coat or feet using a **mild** liquid detergent, such as washing up liquid. The detergent should be well rinsed off, and the coat or feet dried thoroughly;

- eating medicines intended for people or other animals. It is important to only give cats specifically dispensed medicines or approved medicines from either your veterinary surgeon or a pharmacy. Medicines that are suitable for humans can kill cats.

You should always contact your veterinary surgeon if you are concerned that your cat has come into contact with anything that could be harmful.

1.5 Other possible hazards include:

- your cat exploring appliances that arouse its curiosity such as tumble driers;
- falling from heights. If you live in a tall building you should ensure that windows and balconies are cat-proofed to prevent your cat from falling. A cat can climb to quite a high level and can squeeze through a very small hole, so you should check these barriers regularly.

Safety at night

1.6 It may be safer to keep cats indoors at night, when risks to their health and welfare could be greater, providing this does not cause them stress.

Travel

1.7 You may need to transport your cat by car or other vehicle. In this situation, your cat has no control over its environmental temperature, its food and where it sleeps, so, when travelling:

- you should make sure that your cat is not able to move freely about by putting it in a secure cat carrier of adequate size and with good ventilation. Hold the carrier firmly in place with a seat belt, or wedge it e.g. in the foot well of your car, ensuring there is adequate ventilation. You should also ensure that the carrier is not placed where your cat will become too hot, such as in direct sunlight or next to the car's heater. Do not put the carrier in the boot of a saloon car;
- on long journeys you should regularly offer food, water and the use of a litter tray, but only within the safe confines of the vehicle when it has stopped.

- 1.8 Cats should not be left unattended in a car or other vehicle in warm weather. **This can be life threatening and you could be prosecuted for causing unnecessary suffering.** The temperature in the vehicle can become very high extremely quickly and cause heat stroke or death.

Going to the toilet

- 1.9 Cats need to go to the toilet somewhere where they can behave naturally and feel comfortable. Cats prefer a quiet, easily accessible area away from food and water. This can be an indoor tray with some suitable material, such as cat litter or your cat may prefer to go outside. If your cat goes outside, you should still provide a litter tray indoors to allow the cat to continue to go to the toilet as usual even if it does not want to go outside i.e. due to the presence of a new cat in the neighbourhood.

Toileting advice:

- cats should have a litter tray and/or an area in the garden where they can dig and cover urine or faeces with soil or other material;
- cats generally develop a preference for a particular type of litter when they are young. It is best to stick to the type of litter your cat prefers;
- cats do not like to use heavily soiled areas, so the tray should be cleaned daily and regularly disinfected. The disinfectant should be safe for cats and thoroughly rinsed off;
- a litter tray should be placed in an area where the cat feels secure and is not likely to be interrupted by other animals, especially other cats, or people;
- it is best to place the litter tray away from where the cat eats;
- provide at least one litter tray per cat;
- where there is more than one cat, the litter trays should be in different parts of the house, so each cat can get to them easily;
- a cat that is straining to go to the toilet, or is going more frequently than normal may be ill. Owners should consult their veterinary surgeon if their cat is showing these signs;
- be sure to wash your hands or wear gloves when you handle your cat's litter tray and make sure that the tray is not accessible to small children.

Section 2: Diet

Its need for a suitable diet (Section 9(b) of the Act)

- 2.1 This section offers guidance on providing your cat with a suitable diet.
- 2.2 Your cat must always have access to fresh clean water from a clean bowl. This is essential for all cats unless your veterinary surgeon tells you differently. Many cats may not drink large amounts but their thirst may increase in hot weather or if you feed dried food. Changes in the amount of water your cat drinks may also indicate illness.

Balanced Diet

- 2.3 It is essential to provide a nutritionally balanced diet from early in a cat's life to ensure it receives essential nutrients in the correct quantities for good health. A good diet can help prevent the effects of many diseases.
- 2.4 Cats are true carnivores, and cannot be vegetarians. They must eat many of the components found only in meat and animal fat in order to thrive and survive.
- 2.5 Cats have to eat certain proteins, vitamins and fatty acids available only from meat or commercially prepared cat food. They also have a higher protein requirement than some other species, such as dogs. If a home-made diet is to be used for feeding cats you should seek expert advice to ensure all essential nutrients are being provided.
- 2.6 A cat's ability to digest milk is significantly reduced after it is weaned. An adult cat therefore no longer needs milk and, because milk is a food, it is no substitute for essential water.

Healthy weight

- 2.7 **An obese cat is an unhealthy cat.** Some cats may overeat and become overweight leading to a reduced quality of life. Obesity can lead to a whole host of health problems, including heart disease and diabetes.
- 2.8 It is important to remember that an underweight animal may also be ill. You should, therefore, know the best weight for your cat and try to make sure that its weight stays approximately the same throughout its adult life, although there may be some seasonal variation.

Body Condition

2.9 Too thin

- Ribs can be seen on shorthaired cats;
- No fat can be felt (where present the skin pouch underneath the belly is empty i.e. skin on skin);
- Tummy looks empty due to lack of fat;
- Spine and hip bones can be seen; and
- Small amount of muscle over the back and hips, upper legs feel “stringy”, skull bone very obvious when stroking the head. Cat feels “bony” when stroked.

Ideal

- Well-proportioned – your cat looks sleek;
- Waist can be seen behind the ribs;
- Belly skin pouch allowed but is not totally filled out with fat; and
- Ribs can be felt but not seen (with a slight fat covering);

Too heavy

- Ribs not easily felt as covered by a lot of fat;
- Waist not obvious and can't tell if cat has a skin pouch;
- Round body shape especially tummy (bear in mind breed differences); and

How often to feed your cat

2.10 Cats living in the wild would eat many small rodents or birds during the day and so pet cats may prefer to eat small meals frequently. They can have constant access to food, be fed as required, have lots of small meals or a couple of larger meals per day. It very much depends on the cat's preference and your lifestyle but you should try to cater for your pet's preferences so far as you can. Kittens will need feeding with small meals more frequently than adults.

2.11 The food that you give your cat should be fresh every day. The amount of food can be measured out at the beginning of the day to guard against obesity in those cats that are not so good at regulating their appetites. It is a good idea in a 'greedy' cat to have the measured food divided up into a number of meals per day. Where cats are kept indoors, owners can give some dried food in 'puzzle feeders', such as a ball that a cat rolls along the ground and that releases the food gradually. This helps keep the cat entertained and active.

Other dietary needs

2.12 Cats that are pregnant, feeding their kittens, ill, old or young may well have different dietary needs from the average healthy adult cat. Your veterinary surgeon is the best person to advise you about the care of your cat in these circumstances.

2.13 As the person responsible for your cat you are expected to:

- provide food suitable for your cat according to its age and condition;
- provide enough food to keep your cat healthy but not too much to cause obesity; and
- make sure that there are as many food and water bowls available as there are cats. Spread these around so that each cat can eat separately without feeling threatened by the others. Check that all of the animals are getting adequate food and water suitable for their individual needs.

Section 3: Behaviour

Its need to be able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns

(Section 9(c) of the Act)

- 3.1 This section offers guidance on your cat's behaviour.
- 3.2 Although cats have lived with us in our homes for centuries, their behaviour is still very close to that of their wild ancestors. Cats look and behave as they do because they are basically hunters and still need to have an outlet for these natural behaviours. Cats have learnt to adapt to our domestic routines and how we live our lives, but they also need to be able to display their natural behaviour patterns.

Early experiences

- 3.3 Some cats are naturally more confident than others. However, the way that each cat behaves is also influenced by experiences during the first eight to ten weeks of life. Generally, cats that are well 'socialised' at this early age will be able to cope confidently as adults with most new situations and people. You should ensure that your kitten meets and interacts with people, including children, with dogs and with other cats as well as coming into contact with normal household sights and sounds.
- 3.4 Adult cats that have not had these early experiences may find it difficult to cope with day-to-day family life. They may find it stressful and be very nervous, hiding away a great deal of the time. As kittens may not go to new homes until around 8 weeks old or older, it is up to the owner or breeder of the litter to make sure that the kittens are well socialised if they are to develop into confident, happy pet cats.

Boredom and frustration

- 3.5 Cats that are kept indoors or prefer this lifestyle rely on you to provide everything for them, including entertainment. You should ensure that your cat has enough mental stimulation from you and from its environment to avoid boredom and frustration. It is your responsibility to provide opportunities for your cat to satisfy all of its behavioural needs, such as play (hunting behaviours – see section 3) and companionship.
- 3.6 Some cats that are frustrated may begin to exhibit behavioural changes such as withdrawal, overeating, sleeping more and possibly aggression or over-grooming..

Signs of stress

- 3.7 Cats respond to stress in different ways and it is important that you can recognise any changes in the behaviour of your cat. In most cases, where cats are afraid, they prefer to run away to a quiet and hidden location. This is normal behaviour, but is reason for concern if it happens more than just occasionally.
- 3.8 When a cat is frightened or cannot escape, this can lead to aggression. A cat that is not used to people may hiss, spit or lash out when cornered.
- 3.9 Some cats that are afraid may not carry out their normal routine activities, such as eating, sleeping and grooming. Your cat may soil in the house if afraid to go outside or to the litter tray. A cat may also spray urine indoors if stressed; this is especially the case if other cats are causing it to feel stressed. You should pay attention to such behaviours and try to identify, and alter, factors causing your cat to be stressed or fearful.
- 3.10 When cats are stressed, they can develop abnormal behaviours in addition to those described above. These may include:
- being quiet and subdued or going missing for a few days;
 - being very nervous and watchful;
 - being unusually aggressive to people or other cats;
 - stopping eating, drinking or grooming;
 - overeating;
 - being restless and not sleeping/sleeping excessively;
 - howling or making unusual vocal sounds;
 - panting;
 - soiling or spraying urine indoors;
 - persistently hiding away;
 - being unusually affectionate;
 - pacing or 'patrolling' around the house;
 - excessive grooming of the coat, or pulling out fur;
 - being hypersensitive or over-reactive.
- 3.11 It is important that you can recognise any of these signs of stress in your cat; some may also be signs of illness. If you are concerned, you should contact your veterinary surgeon or an animal behaviourist.

Avoiding danger

- 3.12 Fear and anxiety are responses that enable animals to avoid dangerous situations. Animals that are put in situations where they are constantly fearful, however, become very stressed and this can affect their health and welfare.

- 3.13 Part of a cat's natural behaviour is hiding from a real or perceived danger as well as from stressful circumstances. Some cats prefer to hide inside or under things while others prefer to climb up high. You should provide a secure hiding place that your cat can easily reach at all times so that it can hide away from stressful situations, such as contact with other animals or people. Make sure that such facilities are available for each cat if you have more than one.

Typical behaviours

- 3.14 It is natural for cats to display hunting behaviour. This is not linked to hunger, as cats that have recently eaten will sometimes still try to hunt. If your cat does not or cannot go outdoors, you should play with it to mimic these hunting behaviours, using indoor toys and games. These can include a lightweight rolling toy or one that involves catching behaviour, such as fishing rod type toys. Indoor cats can also find mental stimulation in feeding from 'puzzle feeders' that release dried food gradually. Thread is not a suitable toy for cats as it can cause serious intestinal problems if mistakenly ingested.
- 3.15 Avoid using your hands and feet when playing with your cat as this may encourage aggressive behaviour in your pet when, for example, someone tries to stroke it.

Scratching or Claw conditioning

- 3.16 Scratching or 'claw conditioning' is part of normal cat behaviour. Cats condition their claws for various reasons, and regular scratching removes the frayed and worn outer claws, exposing the new and sharper claws growing underneath. Cats prefer to condition their claws on facilities tall enough for them to exercise at full stretch and stable enough so that it does not fall over when used. This is why cats often scratch furniture to condition their claws. To avoid or reduce damage to furniture you can provide a scratching post; these are available from most pet shops or can be home made. The post should be stable and high enough for the cat to exercise at full body stretch.

Exercise

- 3.18 Make sure your cat has opportunities to exercise each day to stay fit and healthy. If it does not go outside, provide suitable indoor activities to keep your cat active.

Section 4: Company

Any need it has to be housed with, or apart from, other animals (Section 9(d) of the Act)

- 4.1 This section offers guidance on providing your cat with suitable company.

Socialisation

- 4.2 The modern day cat originated from a species that lived a very solitary life, although they may choose to be sociable with other cats. They are, however, not as good at organising themselves into 'social groups' as are a more naturally social species like dogs. Cats don't have the same range of face and body postures to signal to each other as do dogs, so they cannot easily communicate with each other to help avoid conflicts. This is why cats fight regularly and why fighting can result in serious injuries.

Relations with other animals and people

- 4.3 Cats can form social groups with other cats that they have grown up with or know well, but will feel very threatened by cats outside this well-known group. The tolerance of cats towards other cats also varies with their early experiences (see Section 3), so their ability and desire to socialise can vary enormously. It is, therefore, best not to keep too many cats together, especially if they do not have access to the outside.
- 4.4 Where cats come into close contact with other cats they do not like, they may become very stressed; this is the commonest cause of stress in cats. Therefore it is important for you to know how your cats react to other cats, both those kept in the same house as well as those in the neighbourhood. In multi-cat households individuals there should be enough space, litter trays and feeding areas for cats to be able to avoid each other.
- 4.5 Stressed cats may sit still or hide, trying to avoid interactions with other cats. In some cases they may soil or spray indoors or exhibit other signs of stress (see Section 3).
- 4.6 Adults or children who do not understand the needs of cats, or how to handle them correctly, can cause them stress. Responsible adults should ensure that cats in their care are handled properly and are not stressed or endangered by other adults, children or animals. Dogs should be introduced to cats very carefully; the dog should be held safely on a lead at first so that it cannot chase the cat.

When you are away from home

- 4.7 You have a responsibility to make sure that your cat is cared for properly when you go away. Many cats prefer to stay in their familiar environment, but you should take into consideration how your cat will cope in your absence, how long you will be away and whether a neighbour or cat sitter will be able to meet your cat's needs. You should consider whether a good cattery would be better, where your cat can be monitored and cared for more closely by someone knowledgeable on how to look after it. All boarding catteries must be licensed by law. When someone else is looking after your cat they are responsible for its welfare and you should ensure that they understand its needs and any special requirements that it may have.

Numbers of animals

- 4.8 If a lot of animals are kept together, this can contribute to a stressful and unhealthy environment. Large numbers of animals need a great deal of care and you should not keep a large number of cats if you cannot meet their welfare needs. If they are not kept in hygienic conditions the environment can become contaminated with infectious agents that can cause disease, which may spread between animals.

Section 5: Health & Welfare

Its need to be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease

(Section 9(e) of the Act)

5.1 This section offers guidance on the health and welfare of your cat.

Health care

5.2 Good health is an essential part of good cat welfare. Your cat's veterinary surgeon is the best person to advise you about routine health care, such as neutering, vaccination, and internal and external parasite control, as well as any health problems it may have.

As the person responsible for your cat's welfare you need to consider:

- prevention of disease. There are various vaccinations that are designed to protect your cat(s) from certain diseases;
- prevention of parasite problems – many worming and flea preparations are available. Your veterinary surgeon or pet care specialist will be able to advise you about which are most suitable for your cat;
- provision of a healthy balanced diet (see Section 2);
- provision of the right environment that minimises the risk of injury and disease (see Section 1);
- prompt action if a cat becomes ill or begins to behave in an unusual way; and
- good dental hygiene.

Illness

5.3 It is important that you are aware of the signs of illness in your cat, and that you consult a veterinary surgeon promptly if these occur.

Indications of illness include:

- a change in behaviour, such as becoming quiet or withdrawn;
- a change in eating or drinking habits, such as a lack of appetite or excessive thirst;
- a change in weight, in either direction;
- signs of injury such as a swollen limb or walking in an abnormal way;
- signs of disease, such as a discharge from the eye, ear or nose, difficulty in going to the toilet, sickness and diarrhoea; and
- signs of pain, such as not wanting to be touched in a sensitive area.

This list is not exhaustive and any change in your cat's behaviour should alert you to the possibility that it may be ill. If you think that

there is anything wrong with your cat, call your veterinary practice for advice.

Grooming

- 5.4 Other natural cat behaviours include grooming and keeping the coat free from tangles. However, some cats need help with their coat care. If you have a longhaired cat, remember that you will have to groom the coat at least once a day to avoid matts and tangles. Your cat may also need special attention when recovering from an illness or injury. When cats stop grooming themselves, owners should seek advice from their veterinary surgeon, as this can be a sign of stress or disease.

Neutering

- 5.5 One particularly important consideration is preventing the birth of unwanted kittens. You should, therefore, consider having your cat neutered. Cats can be neutered from about four months old onwards, but your veterinary surgeon will be able to advise you about the best age. With female cats, it is best to have them neutered before their first season. This usually happens when they are between four to six months old.

Having your cat neutered has many benefits:

- female cats can have as many as three litters a year if not neutered. A cat can have up to five or six kittens per litter, potentially producing up to 18 possibly unwanted kittens a year so you may end up with more cats than you can properly care for;
- motherhood takes a lot out of a cat and having repeated litters may shorten her life expectancy;
- neutering female cats means they will not suffer from infections of the uterus later in life;
- un-neutered male cats are more likely to mark by spraying strong smelling urine inside their homes;
- un-neutered male cats are more likely to wander widely and to fight. Neutering them reduces the risk of abscesses resulting from fights and injuries caused by road traffic accidents;
- un-neutered male cats can cause distress to neighbours by spraying near their homes, fighting with their pet cats and being noisy;
- reproductive hormones can influence the behaviour of un-neutered male and female cats. This can result in the cat advertising their availability by making loud sounds ('calling') as well as fighting, wandering and marking their territory;
- Feline Leukaemia Virus (FeLV) and Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV) are serious diseases spread through saliva. As neutered cats

- are less likely to wander and fight, there is less likelihood of them becoming infected or spreading these diseases to other cats; and
- neutering prevents the development of uterine and testicular cancer and reduces the risk of female cats developing mammary tumours.

If you decide not to have your cat neutered and wish to breed from it, there are a number of considerations to be taken into account. These include:

- finding suitable homes for the kittens; and
 - health screening to ensure that the parents do not carry any inherited defects which may be passed on to their offspring.
- You should carefully consider whether your cat is a good candidate for breeding and you should discuss this with your veterinary surgeon.

You will also need to consider the potential problem of unplanned matings.

Help may be available from various charities who offer neutering at a discounted rate for those on benefits or low incomes.

The pro's and cons of whether to neuter your cat, as well as timing, should be discussed with your veterinary surgeon to decide whether it is in the best interest of your cat.

Identification

5.6 Cats are generally identified by two methods (that may be used in combination) to help trace their owner should they become lost. These are:

- microchipping – the preferred method of identification. A microchip is a tiny computer chip, about the size of a grain of rice, containing a unique identification number. It is injected under the skin of a pet by a veterinary surgeon or trained pet care specialist and the owner's details are kept on a database. This will help you to be reunited with your cat if it is lost as, when a pet is found and taken to a rescue centre or a veterinary surgeon, it will be scanned with a reader to see if there is a chip under the skin. The number shown on the reader will then enable the owner to be traced;
- wearing a collar that has the cat's owner's contact details. A correctly fitted 'quick release' or snap opening collar is best, as it means that the cat is less likely to be trapped should the collar become caught or tangled. The collar should be of the correct size (neither too tight nor too loose) and you should be able to place two fingers underneath it when the cat is wearing it. A cat's leg or jaw may become caught in an elasticated or ill-fitting collar and this can result in serious injury. A collar can also be lost.

What to do if your cat is missing

- 5.7 You should contact local veterinary surgeons and rescue centres as well those in a wider area as cats can travel for some distance if lost. You can also put up notices locally and ask your neighbours to look in their sheds or garages in case your cat has been accidentally shut in. If your cat is microchipped it may be identified as yours when scanned by a microchip reader and this will speed its return to you.

Annex 1

The Law

The Animal Welfare Act 2006

The following sections of the Act are referred to in the code and are set out here for ease of reference:

The boxes below contain extracts from the relevant sections of the Act.

The box shaded grey summarises the relevant offences and penalties in the Act.

Section 3 of the Animal Welfare Act 2006 provides:

Responsibility for animals

- (1) In this Act, references to a person responsible for an animal are to a person responsible for an animal whether on a permanent or temporary basis.
- (2) In this Act, references to being responsible for an animal include being in charge of it.
- (3) For the purposes of this Act, a person who owns an animal shall always be regarded as being a person who is responsible for it.
- (4) For the purposes of this Act, a person shall be treated as responsible for any animal for which a person under the age of 16 years of whom he has actual care and control is responsible.

Section 4 of the Animal Welfare Act 2006 provides:

Unnecessary suffering

- (1) A person commits an offence if –
 - (a) an act of his, or a failure of his to act, causes an animal to suffer,
 - (b) he knew, or ought reasonably to have known, that the act, or failure to act, would have that effect or be likely to do so,
 - (c) the animal is a protected animal, and
 - (d) the suffering is unnecessary.
- (2) A person commits an offence if-
 - (a) he is responsible for an animal,
 - (b) an act, or failure to act, of another person causes the animal to suffer,
 - (c) he permitted that to happen or failed to take such steps (whether by way of supervising the other person or otherwise) as were reasonable in all the

circumstances to prevent that happening, and
(d) the suffering is unnecessary.

(3) The considerations to which it is relevant to have regard when determining for the purposes of this section whether suffering is unnecessary include –

- (a) whether the suffering could reasonably have been avoided or reduced;
 - (b) whether the conduct which caused the suffering was in compliance with any relevant enactment or any relevant provisions of a licence or code of practice issued under an enactment;
 - (c) whether the conduct which caused the suffering was for a legitimate purpose, such as –
 - (i) the purpose of benefiting the animal, or
 - (ii) the purpose of protecting a person, property or other animal;
 - (d) whether the suffering was proportionate to the purpose of the conduct concerned;
 - (e) whether the conduct concerned was in all the circumstances that of a reasonably competent and humane person.
- (4) Nothing in this section applies to the destruction of an animal in an appropriate and humane manner.

Section 9 of the Animal Welfare Act 2006 provides:

Duty of person responsible for animal to ensure welfare

(1) A person commits an offence if he does not take such steps as are reasonable in all the circumstances to ensure that the needs of an animal for which he is responsible are met to the extent required by good practice.

(2) For the purpose of this Act, an animal's needs shall be taken to include-

- (a) its need for a suitable environment,
- (b) its need for a suitable diet,
- (c) its need to be able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns,
- (d) any need it has to be housed with, or apart from, other animals, and
- (e) its need to be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease.

(3) The circumstances to which it is relevant to have regard when applying subsection (1) include, in particular –

- (a) any lawful purpose for which the animal is kept, and
- (b) any lawful activity undertaken in relation to the animal.

(4) Nothing in this section applies to the destruction of an animal in an appropriate and humane manner.

Section 14 of the Animal Welfare Act 2006 provides:

Codes of Practice

(3) A person's failure to comply with a provision of a code of practice issued under this section shall not of itself render him liable to proceedings of any kind.

(4) In any proceedings against a person for an offence under this Act or an offence under regulations under section 12 or 13 –

(a) a failure to comply with a relevant provision of a code of practice issued under this section may be relied upon as tending to establish liability, and

(b) compliance with a relevant provision of such a code of practice may be relied upon as tending to negative liability.

Offences and Penalties

A person who is convicted of an offence under section 4 of the Act may be imprisoned for a maximum period of 6 months* and/or fined up to £20,000. If they are convicted of an offence under section 9 (failing to ensure the animal's welfare) they can be imprisoned for the same maximum period and fined up to level 5 on the standard scale.

Proceedings may be brought up to 3 years after the offence was committed. Prosecutions under the Act are brought by the local authority in the Magistrates Court. Private prosecutions can be brought by any party, such as the RSPCA.

* The maximum period of imprisonment will be 51 weeks when section 281 (5) of the Criminal Justice Act 2003 comes into force.

Other legislation affecting cats

As well as the Animal Welfare Act 2006 there are a number of other laws that affect the way you keep your cat. The ones most likely to affect the owner or keeper of a pet cat are summarised below.

- **Your cat during holidays**

If you are away from home and need to put your cat in a cattery, you should check that the cattery has been licensed by the local Council under the **Animal Boarding Establishments Act 1963**. The Act can also apply to people taking cats into their homes if they do so for reward (usually referred to as 'home boarding').

If you wish to take your cat with you on a holiday abroad, other than to the Republic of Ireland, there are very strict rules about what treatment your cat will need before it can return to the UK. It takes 7 months minimum to comply with the rules so you need to plan well ahead. You should ask your veterinary surgeon about the details of what you have to do or look at the DEFRA website on the Pet Travel Scheme (PETS) page (see Annex 2).

Under Article 4 of the **Welfare of Animals (Transport) (England) Order 2007** it is an offence to transport any animal in a way which causes, or is likely to cause, injury or unnecessary suffering to that animal.

- **The Pet Animals Act 1951**

The Pet Animals Act 1951 (as amended in 1983) protects the welfare of animals sold as pets. The Act requires any person keeping a pet shop to be licensed by the local authority. Before granting a licence the local authority must be satisfied that the animals are kept in accommodation that is both suitable and clean; that they are supplied with appropriate food and drink; and are adequately protected from disease and fire. The local authority may attach any conditions to the licence, may inspect the licensed premises at all reasonable times and may refuse a licence if the conditions at the premises are unsatisfactory or if the terms of the licence are not being complied with.

Local authorities are responsible for enforcing the law in this area and anyone who has reason to believe that a pet shop is keeping animals in inadequate conditions should raise the matter with the local authority who will decide what action to take within the range of its powers.

Under section.2 pets cannot be sold in the street, including on barrows and markets.

Annex 2

Sources of information

- Your veterinary surgeon.
 - The Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons, Belgravia House, 62-64 Horseferry Road, London SW1P 2AF. The website has a “find-a-vet” facility: www.rcvs.org.uk
- Local libraries for books on cat care.
- Websites such as:
 - Association of Pet Behaviour Counsellors: www.apbc.org.uk
 - Blue Cross: www.thebluecross.org.uk.
 - Cats Protection: www.cats.org.uk.
 - Feline Advisory Bureau: www.fabcats.org.
 - Governing Council of the Cat Fancy in the UK: www.gccf.org.uk
 - PDSA: www.pdsa.org.uk.
 - Pet Care Trust: www.petcare.org.uk.
 - Pet Food Manufacturers Association: www.pfma.com.
 - Pet Health Council: www.pethealthcouncil.co.uk
 - RSPCA: www.rspca.org.uk.
 - The Cat Group: www.thecatgroup.org.uk.
 - Defra website for information on the Animal Welfare Act, Pet Travel Scheme (PETS) and to download the Code of Practice for the Welfare of Cats: www.defra.gov.uk