



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

06 MAR 2019

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David Rutley MP
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Sir Mark Hendrick MP
House of Commons
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Our ref: MC2019/02934/AD

26 February 2019

Dear Sir Mark,

Thank you for your email of 7 February to the Secretary of State on behalf of your constituent, Preston, about the tethering campaign, #BreakTheChain. I am replying as the Minister responsible for this policy area.

It is found that the welfare of a horse is being compromised, or that it is suffering unnecessarily, it should be reported to the local authority which has powers under the Animal Welfare Act 2006 to investigate allegations of cruelty to, or neglect of, animals. Under the 2006 Act it is an offence to cause any captive animal unnecessary suffering or to fail to provide for its welfare. Anyone who is cruel to an animal, or does not provide for its welfare, may be banned from owning animals. They may also face an unlimited fine, be sent to prison, or both. The Government is increasing the maximum prison sentences tenfold for animal abusers. This is one part of our plan to deliver world-leading animal welfare in the years ahead.

Defra is not an enforcement body and so would not be best placed to deal with these sorts of incidents. Having said that, I would like to assure you that the Government takes animal welfare very seriously and is determined where possible to enhance the UK's already high reputation in this respect. In that regard, it may be helpful if I explain what the Government is doing to combat the problem of abandoned, neglected and abused horses, and the role that the Central Equine Database (CED) can play in bringing about an improvement in horse welfare.

Under the relevant legislation, it is a legal requirement that all horse owners have all their horses properly identified, and all horse passports issued since 1 July 2009 must contain a microchip number. Defra recently announced its intention to extend microchipping requirements for horses of all ages in forthcoming equine identification regulations. This will make it faster and easier to identify horses and ponies.

Local authorities are responsible for compliance with the legislation and its enforcement. Enforcement will vary according to location, depending on local priorities. We therefore encourage all interested parties to work together at local level to use the available powers to address the problem of abandoned horses.



The Control of Horses Act 2015 introduced more flexible options for the disposal of abandoned horses and has been welcomed by landowners, local authorities, countryside bodies and animal welfare charities. The 2015 Act allows landowners to remove horses left on their land and take them immediately to a place of safety. They must notify the local police within 24 hours of doing so, and if the horses' owners can be identified, landowners must also notify them. If no owner comes forward, or can be identified within four working days, landowners may then decide what to do with the horses. Under the 2015 Act, landowners will be able to rehome seized horses, either privately or via charities, or sell them. As a last resort, they can have the horses humanely euthanised.

Lord Gardiner was pleased to be able to announce at the National Equine Forum on 8 March 2018 that the CED is now fully operational and can start to play its vital role in safeguarding horse welfare and the food chain. It is now being used to good effect by local authorities and the Food Standards Agency. I would like to reassure you that any historical information held by Passport Information Offices and uploaded to the CED is checked for accuracy and cleansed before it is entered onto the CED, and that the CED is a valuable tool for correcting previous inaccuracies and for improving the quality of equine data held in the UK.

Thank you once again for taking the time to contact the Secretary of State about this important issue.

With best wishes,



DAVID RUTLEY MP