



Department  
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Food & Rural Affairs

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Dear George,

Thank you for your email of 24 February to the Secretary of State on behalf of your constituents about cat theft and the Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill. I am replying as the Minister responsible for this policy area and I apologise for the delay in doing so.

We are aware that the theft of a much-loved pet causes emotional trauma and can impact pet owners and families. In response to concerns about the apparent increase in pet theft since the start of the pandemic, the Government set up the Pet Theft Taskforce, to gather evidence to understand the factors that may be contributing to any rise in pets being stolen and are exploring the issue from end to end, considering which potential interventions might improve the situation.

The Taskforce's recommendations include the creation of a new 'pet abduction' offence to recognise that pets are not mere items of property and to recognise the potential impact on their welfare when they are taken by strangers. As your constituents mention, the offence as currently drafted in the Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill focuses on dogs, as of crimes recorded by police in which animals are stolen, around seven in ten involve dogs. We have listened carefully to the views expressed during the passage of the Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill that the new pet abduction offence should be extended to cats. We are currently considering this issue further.

The Government committed in its manifesto and reaffirmed the intention to introduce compulsory cat microchipping in the Action Plan for Animal Welfare. In December 2021, we announced that we will introduce compulsory microchipping for all owned cats of 20 weeks and older. We plan to introduce the necessary legislation when Parliamentary time allows. The new legislation is intended to increase the likelihood that lost or stray pet cats can be reunited with their keeper, benefitting cat welfare.

Yours sincerely,

**THE RT HON LORD BENYON**