



YOUR TEAM IS GOING TO RESEARCH

Support for vulnerable pet owners

and speak **for and against** it being introduced

This brief has been produced as part of the **RSPCA's Animal Welfare: The Great Debate** and is a starting point for the research you will need to do into the subject in order to ensure a successful debate. The points for or against a subject may not be RSPCA policy and represent some of the wider thinking around the subject.

- Although the National Health Service (NHS) and other social services exist to support those in need, there is little or no State support for vulnerable people who need help with their pets.
- People who own pets can face unforeseen circumstances which threatens the wellbeing of their beloved pet - such as an accident or ill health (for the pet or the owner), as well as other tragic circumstances such as domestic abuse where the animal can also be threatened or harmed and even where the owner escapes the abuse, there may be difficulties in finding safe places that will also take pets.
- Currently pet owners are able to access support from an animal welfare charity, they either have to pay the full cost of treatment and/or accommodation (which can rise to many thousands) or pay for annual or monthly pet insurance which may cover some of the costs.
- Some people think vet and accommodation costs are unaffordable, especially if they have to pay upfront or the vet practice doesn't let the owner pay over a long period of time.

FOR

Here are some points **in favour** creating a system of State support for vulnerable pet owners – what other points can you find?

- Section 58 of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 requires local councils to protect the person's property - which would include pets - for instances when the owner persons is being cared for in hospital. But this does not cover all eventualities and not all councils appear to offer this service.
- Support for vulnerable people exists in terms of medical and social care, so this should be extended to pets, which are sentient beings which also find themselves in a vulnerable situation. State support could help owners in these times of need.
- As a nation of animal lovers, we can all help to look after the UK's animals.

AGAINST

Here are some reasons why a system of State support for vulnerable pet owners **shouldn't be** created – can you find any more?

- When acquiring a pet it is important that the owner ensures they have the means to care for that animal in all eventualities. This means that there should be sufficient money set aside as well as alternative arrangements for keeping the pet safe and provided for should the owner be unable to.
- If people are worried about money they should get pet insurance to help cover veterinary costs.
- The NHS and social services are already stretched in caring for people, there is not the means to extend this system to cover animals.

Information you may want to find out

- How many people have pet insurance?
- What other arrangements can pet owners make for their animals should they be unable to look after them?
- How much does vet treatment cost – how much money would a State support service need?
- How many people have pets and does that justify a State support system? Are there organisations that already exist to help owners with the veterinary and accommodation costs for their animals?

Potential sources of information

- RSPCA website: www.rspca.cymru
- RSPCA facts and figures: <http://media.rspca.org.uk/media/facts>
- PDSA: www.pdsa.org.uk

