

## MONTHLY GATESHEAD HEALTH STAFF ADVICE BULLETIN

### ISSUE 26: Pet Costs and Consumer Rights

Approximately 57% of households in the United Kingdom are estimated to have a pet, showcasing the nation's fondness for animals such as cats, dogs, rabbits, guinea pigs, hamsters, birds, and more. The onset of the pandemic witnessed a surge in pet adoptions, with many finding comfort in their animal companions during various lockdowns. Unfortunately, the aftermath of the pandemic led to a rise in pets being handed over to charities or given up due to changes in people's lives, circumstances, and financial struggles exacerbated by the current cost of living crisis.

Recognising the vital role that pets play in people's lives, this bulletin aims to provide financial assistance advice for pet owners. Additionally, we will address what steps to take if your pet falls ill or passes away shortly after purchase, as well as guidance on how to file a complaint against a vet or veterinary practice.

#### Pet Food Banks and Collection Points

Certain foodbanks may have the capacity to provide pet food. To explore this option, inquire with your nearby food bank to check if they offer assistance for pets. Additionally, you might find specialised pet food banks in your local area by:

- Asking your local vet or pet store for information on available services.
- Doing an online search using keywords such as 'pet food bank' along with your local area.
- Checking out the [RSPCA](#) foodbank map
- Asking local supermarkets, pet stores, or animal charities about designated free pet food collection points.

#### Getting Help with Vet Care

You might be eligible for free or reduced veterinary care through charitable organisations such as RSPCA and PDSA. To look into this possibility, you can visit their websites for information and potential assistance:



[Check if you can get free or reduced vet care on the RSPCA website](#)

[Check if you can get free or reduced vet care on the PDSA website](#)

- The Blue Cross offer a [Veterinary Care Fund](#) specifically designed to help pet owners who are struggling to afford veterinary care for their pets. To access this fund, your vet must apply for it on your behalf. Approval depends on their assessment of your pet's clinical needs and professional opinion of whether your pet meets the criteria. Not all vets will be aware of the fund so it's worth highlighting it to them. If granted, the fund can contribute up to £300 towards treatment costs.
- If you're struggling to pay your vet bills, talk to your vet about payment options, such as reducing the bill or setting up a payment plan.
- In cases where setting up an affordable payment plan proves difficult, seeking [debt advice](#) is recommended.

## When your pet gets ill or dies after buying

Depending on the circumstances of the purchase, if your pet falls ill or dies shortly after purchase, you might be able to get a refund or replacement from the trader you bought it from.

### If you bought your pet from a shop

If you spend money taking your pet to the vet soon after you bought it, you should ask the trader you bought it from to cover the cost of the vet's fees.

Check if the shop has a licence to sell pets from their local council - it should be displayed in their shop or on their website. If they don't have a licence [check how to report the shop to Trading Standards](#).

### If you bought the pet from a private seller

If you purchase a pet from a private seller, rather than from a shop or organisation, you have less consumer rights. You can only get a refund for the cost of a pet if it didn't match the description the seller gave you. So if the seller described the pet as healthy, you might have a right to a refund.

Unfortunately, if you didn't ask about the pet's health and the seller didn't tell you how healthy it was, there is nothing you can do.



### Top tip- get a contract when you buy a puppy

In recent years, there has been an increase in cases of puppies falling ill or dying shortly after being purchased from private sellers, often coming from poorly managed 'puppy farms.'

To safeguard consumers, buyers are encouraged to ask for the signing of a 'puppy contract' from private sellers. This legally binding contract means the seller should provide a description of the puppy's health and history, offering consumers better protection. Having such details in writing allows buyers to seek a refund if the puppy does not meet the description. A free puppy contract can be downloaded from the [Puppy Contract](#) website.

## Complaining about a vet

If you feel your vet or veterinary practice has been unprofessional or negligent, you may be in your right to ask them:

- To correct the problem for free
- For a full or partial refund if they can't correct the problem

### If a vet has been negligent

Negligence is when a vet fails to meet the standard of care based on what other vets would reasonably do in the same circumstances.



Negligence results in harm, loss, injury, or damage of some sort. This might be the result of the vet prescribing an inappropriate treatment that causes permanent injury or for your pet to die.

If you think your vet has been negligent and you want to act, think of the outcome you would like to achieve. For example:

- a formal apology
- free corrective treatment
- a refund
- compensation

Try and communicate with your vet first and negotiate the outcome you want. Check their complaints procedure and try to resolve the problem. If the problem is still unresolved you can contact [the Veterinary Client Mediation Service](#)

### If a vet has been unprofessional

If you think your vet is guilty of professional misconduct, [report them to the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons](#) - they regulate the professional conduct of vets and will investigate your complaint.

It might be professional misconduct if your vet has:

- been dishonest
- taken advantage of your age or inexperience
- acted against your instructions



**Remember you can get in touch with your Citizens Advice Gateshead team for impartial advice, information, and guidance.**

**Email [qestaffswa@citizensadvicegateshead.org.uk](mailto:qestaffswa@citizensadvicegateshead.org.uk) or call 0191 490 4231 and we'll be back in touch with you within 1 working day Monday to Friday.**