

To the regulator.

Please can you accept my letter and include it in responses for consideration with regards to your consultation for <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/online-safety/illegal-and-harmful-content/illegal-harms-further-consultation-torture-and-animal-cruelty/>

I am trying to raise awareness for the need to end free animals being advertised online. My direct observations have been carried out over the past year for just the trading platform Freeads marketplace, (as an individual doing this in my free time, I have not been able to track all UK listings placed on social media sites, so I just concentrate on Freeads. I have been told however by many animal charity groups up and down the country, Facebook is even worse and there are many other platforms out there, Preloved etc).

With social media sites providing a trading platform which accounts for seventy percent of the purchases of dogs alone in the UK, it is only natural that those people wanting to offload their unwanted pets to use these sites as well. Most of the time as I have proved, ignoring the online posting rules on Freeads as example, and writing words to the effect of, dog is for free, need gone today, no price is required, had to put a price because Freeads advised etc. So most people either have not read the online posting rules, or have done so and chosen to ignore them. Instead preferring to put their dog at risk of being acquired by persons who wish to use the animal (dogs) for use of torture and abuse, and or breeding machines (cash cows). Please remember PETA confirm only one in ten people looking for free dogs on these sites are genuine. So this means the other nine people who are acquiring these dogs are using them for either torture, illegal dog fighting, (fighting dogs and bait dogs), abuse (rape) and breeding machines (cash cows). The RSPCA confirm a concerning increase month by month of reported animal cruelty cases up and down the country. Sadly in my own county of Powys, an illegal organised dog fight takes place each day of the month.

I have always believed animals should never be given away for free, and PAAG agree with this, however there are no trading laws to prevent animals (dogs) being given away for free. There are only on-line guidelines, and Freeads are not monitoring their own site for policy violations, instead they are only taking down, (badly editing by adding a single line of text to the offending advert which reads, "minimum fee of £50 applies per dog as per animal welfare policies". Often this addition of text to the advert does nothing to deter the reader from approaching the author of the advert to acquire a free dog, when quite often the advert will still read, I am giving away my dog etc, with this wording not having been removed. People like myself who watch the on-line adverts each day, for example those people looking for potential fighting dog candidates, will realize very quickly, that those adverts with the added narrative by Freeads staff, (often in different tying font) of £50 minimum fee applies as per Freeads animal welfare policies etc, are adverts that have been flagged, however were originally and probably are still dogs that are FREE if the owner is approached.

I believe all newly placed adverts for animals being placed on social media sites should firstly be approved by staff of these sites, and before going live to the general population. Sadly from my own experience, quite often I have seen new adverts placed on a Friday that are still active the following week, and in some cases several weeks later, (despite having been flagged). I recently gave an

example of a Staffie type dog that was listed for Free on a Friday, and rehomed over the weekend as the advert was never edited or removed. I can only hope this poor dog, rehomed in Birmingham, (another hot spot for illegal dog fighting), I can only hope this dog was rehomed to a caring individual, and not one of the nine people looking for a dog to harm, (for use in an illegal dog fighting ring). Why with all this evidence are these sites still able to continue their business as usual, with all these risks known for animal welfare. We can do something about this so easily, end free animals being put up as available on social media sites.

Sadly I have written to Freeads several times about this subject and their platform and never received a reply about this. I have also written to PAAG and my local MP's about this over the last year, only to be advised they act on guidance from PAAG only. A recent response from Animal Welfare Wales suggested I write to you about this matter with regards to your consultation which I am doing so.

We may never be aware of how many "Adam Brittens" and others there are out there, but we can at least make it harder for them to acquire their victims by ending the continuous flow of free dogs I am seeing placed each day on Freeads. Please use this bill to add on a protection for these dogs who can not protect themselves. Please make it illegal to place an advertisement for a free dog online. Please make editors and CEO's accountable for their trading platforms, or perhaps so difficult and non profitable, that they simply remove the availability to acquire any animals on line.

Currently we have a UK national dog crisis. The government pounds up and and down the country are full to capacity, with often shockingly seeing fifty seven percent of dogs never leaving the pound. Sadly most of these dogs are put to sleep after they have served their seven days of not being claimed as illegal strays, or where dogs have not been adapted, (sold). The few lucky ones who escape the pound, only do so if local charities are able to find room (fosters) for them whilst these dogs are assessed, often taking a few weeks or months. Compounded on the back of the covid pandemic when it seems everyone went out and got a dog, to only try to rehome it when life returned to normal and people returned to work. Worse still, people are still legally breeding dogs and illegally breeding dogs up and down the country, as a means of making quick cash. I myself am the owner of a dumped pug. Dumped in Liverpool graveyard, with a double hernia, half her body weight, riddled with parasites, and still in milk.

Only government policy will help end the UK dog crisis, and this bill provides the opportunity to end the online availability for FREE dogs. Please ensure a way is found to make this law, just as you implemented Lucy Law.

I really think that by taking away the ability to acquire a free dog on-line, often on a whim and at the click of a button, will provide a huge improvement in animal welfare and in time reduce the UK dog crisis. You will essentially make people accountable for their purchases of these sentimental creatures. I also believe all puppies should be chipped within a few days after birth to ensure traceability.

Please lets end the UK dog crisis.

Signed, ✂]

**Additional evidence from Name Withheld 1:**

I recently wrote to you with reference to your consultation, <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/online-safety/illegal-and-harmful-content/illegal-harms-further-consultation-torture-and-animal-cruelty/>

My letter focuses on how easy it is for anyone to acquire a free dog in the UK, and how government need to wake up to the national UK dog crisis. Only with an end to free animals being posted on line, can we protect animals from abuse, torture and neglect.

Please see and print of daily stories from:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/DRDUK/>

to help understand the huge UK dog crisis we have.

Please make it law to end free animals being posted on line, and please find a way to end illegal dog breeding.

Signed, [✂]