



Animal Welfare Report 2023



Department of
**Agriculture, Environment
and Rural Affairs**

An Roinn

**Talmhaíochta, Comhshaoil
agus Gnóthaí Tuaithe**

Depairtment o'

**Fairmin, Environment
an' Kintra Matthers**

www.daera-ni.gov.uk





Introduction

In Northern Ireland, the welfare of animals is governed by the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 (the 2011 Act). The 2011 Act includes a duty of care in respect of all animals under the permanent or temporary control of a person. Responsibility for the welfare of an animal remains with the relevant owner at all times.

The review of the implementation of the 2011 Act, which took place during 2014 to 2016, recommended that the then Department of Agriculture and Rural Development should publish an annual report setting out information relevant to animal welfare enforcement. This is the eighth report published using information provided by the three enforcement bodies and detailing the range and level of animal welfare enforcement activities that took place during 2023.

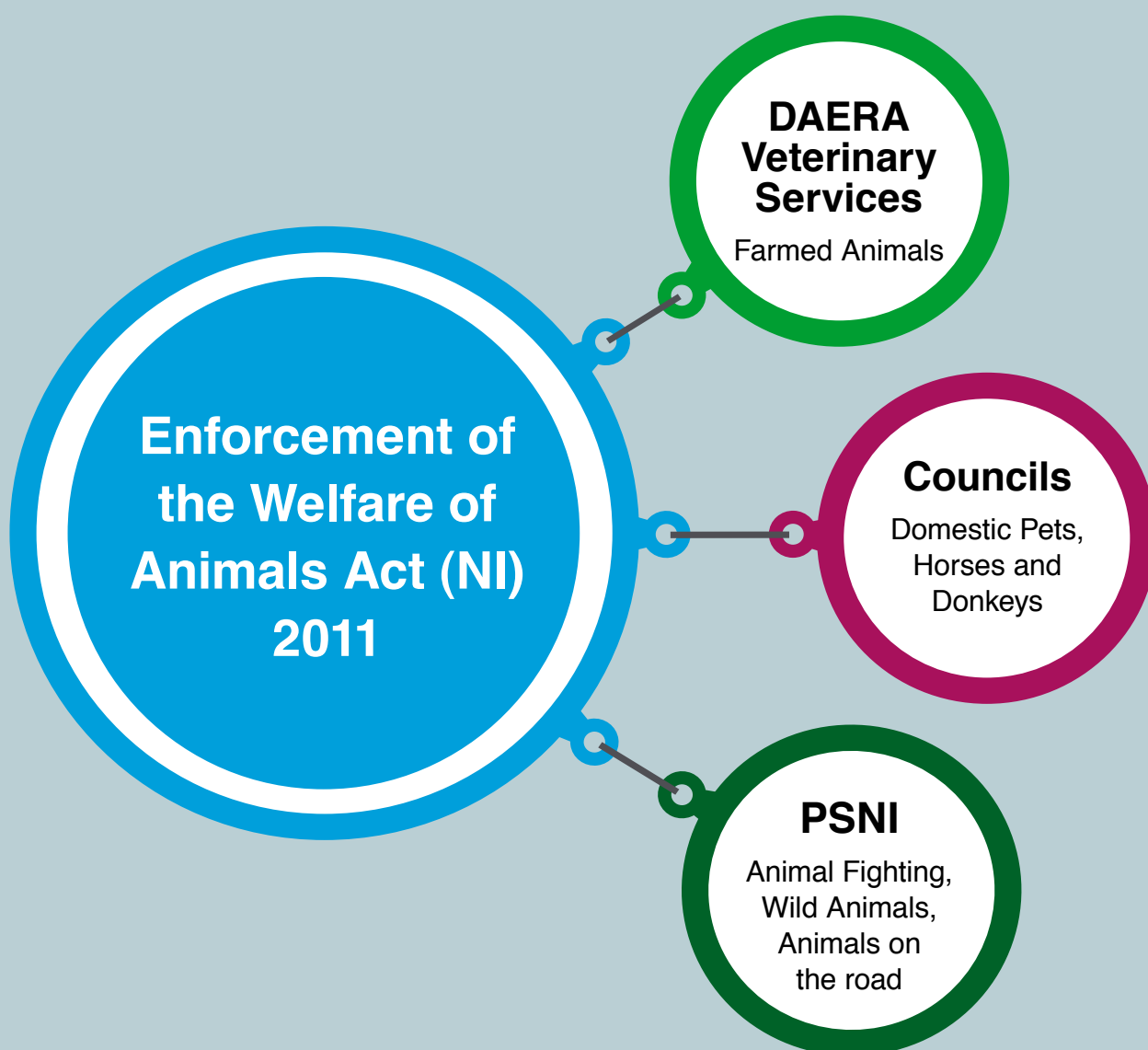
Background

The 2011 Act provides the same level of protection for both farmed and non-farmed animals and sets out the five needs of an animal.

The vast majority of owners and keepers comply with their duty of care. However, there are occasions when owners fail to do so and the 2011 Act sets out offences regarding animal welfare. For example, it is an offence to fail to take reasonable steps to ensure that the welfare needs of an animal are met or to take action, or fail to take action, that causes an animal to suffer unnecessarily.

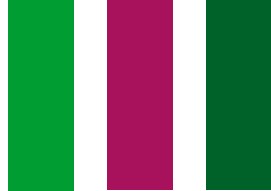


Responsibility for the enforcement of the 2011 Act has been conferred on three enforcement agencies; Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA), Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) and local councils.



If a member of the public has any concerns regarding the welfare of an animal they should contact the relevant enforcement body. Contact information can be found in the [nidirect.gov.uk Animal Welfare section](https://nidirect.gov.uk/Animal-Welfare-section). Full details of all complaints will be recorded and passed to enforcement officers who will investigate and take action to ensure the owner or keeper complies with their obligations.

Additional information on what happens when a complaint is received by an enforcement body is available on pages 11-14 of this report.



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DAERA enforces the Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 which were made under the 2011 Act. The work is delivered by DAERA Veterinary Service Inspectors and Veterinary Officers located across Northern Ireland in 12 local DAERA Direct offices.

DAERA also has responsibility for the licensing and inspection of pet shops, animal boarding, riding and zoological establishments under the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 1972.

Veterinary Service Inspectors may utilise a range of options when dealing with an animal welfare case. For example, they may provide advice, give a warning, issue the owner with a legally binding Improvement Notice or initiate a prosecution.

The following information outlines the enforcement actions taken by DAERA during 2023.

Farmed Animal Welfare Inspections

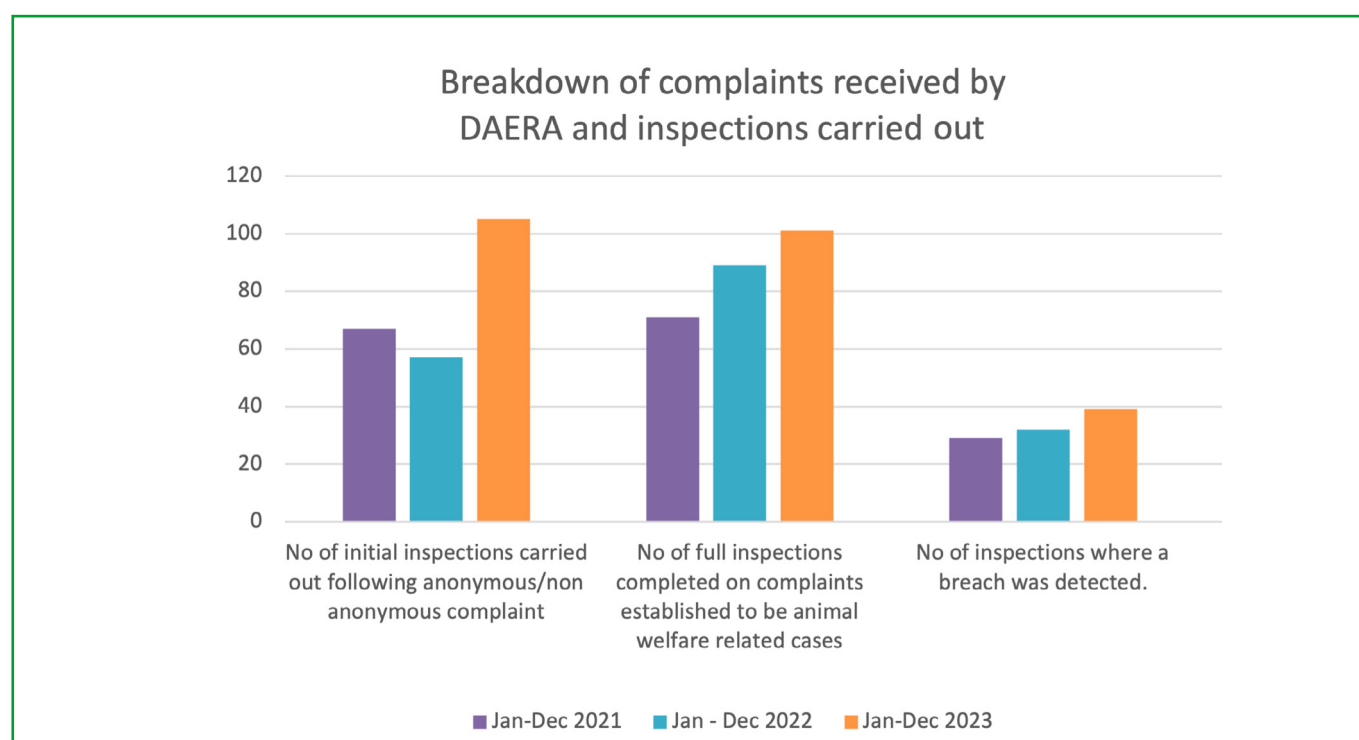
From 1 January 2023 to 31 December 2023, 1279 production site inspections for compliance with animal welfare requirements were completed. The overall compliance rate was 91%. This was an increase of 8% when compared with the period from 1 January 2022 to December 2022 and the same level of compliance when compared with the period from 1 January 2021 to 31 December 2021.



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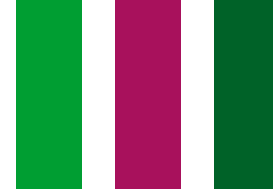
Inspections take place as a result of complaints e.g. from members of the public; or are targeted e.g. as a result of information produced by vets working in meat plants; or are programmed as part of the statutory cross compliance surveillance system to assess whether on-farm welfare meets the standards laid down in legislation. From 1 January 2023 to 31 December 2023, 206 of the 1279 production site inspections completed originated from complaints.

	2021	2022	2023
Number of initial inspections carried out following complaint.	67	57	105
Number of full inspections completed on complaints established to be animal welfare related cases.	71	89	101
Number of inspections where a breach was detected.	29	32	39
Number of welfare seizures.	0	0	2
Total number of animals seized.	0	0	300



Welfare of Animals investigations closed during period 1 January 2023 to December 2023

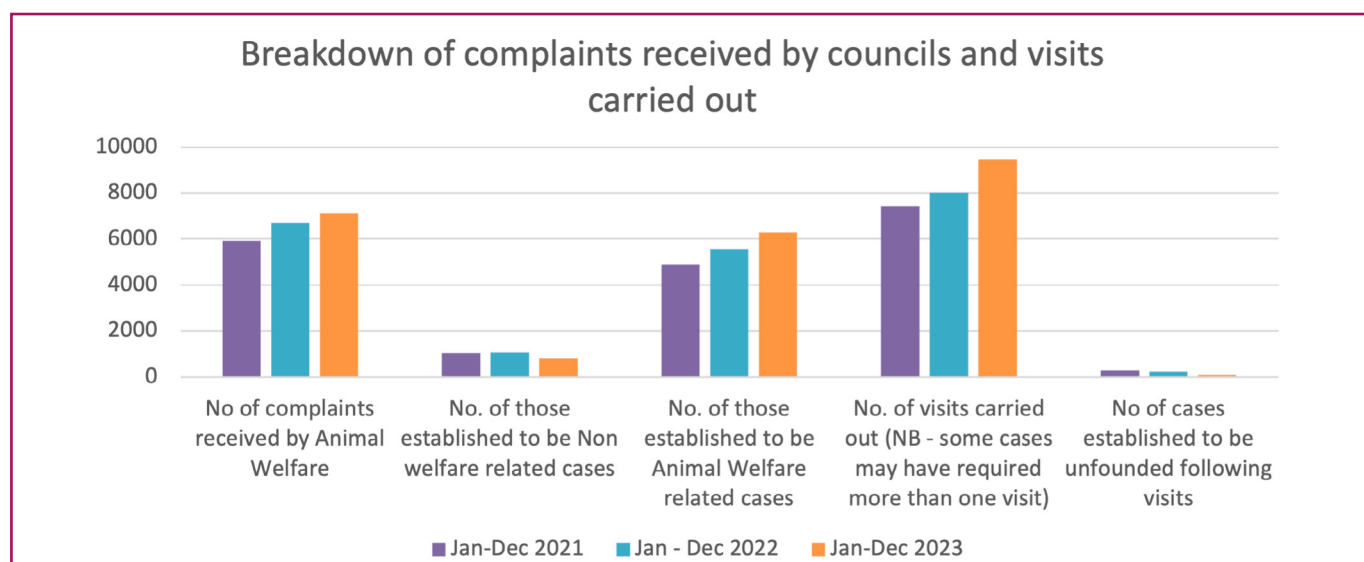
Case withdrawn	Compliance achieved	Warning letter issued	Formal caution delivered	Convicted in court	Dismissed in court	Total
21	0	2	0	6	1	30



Regional Councils' Animal Welfare Service

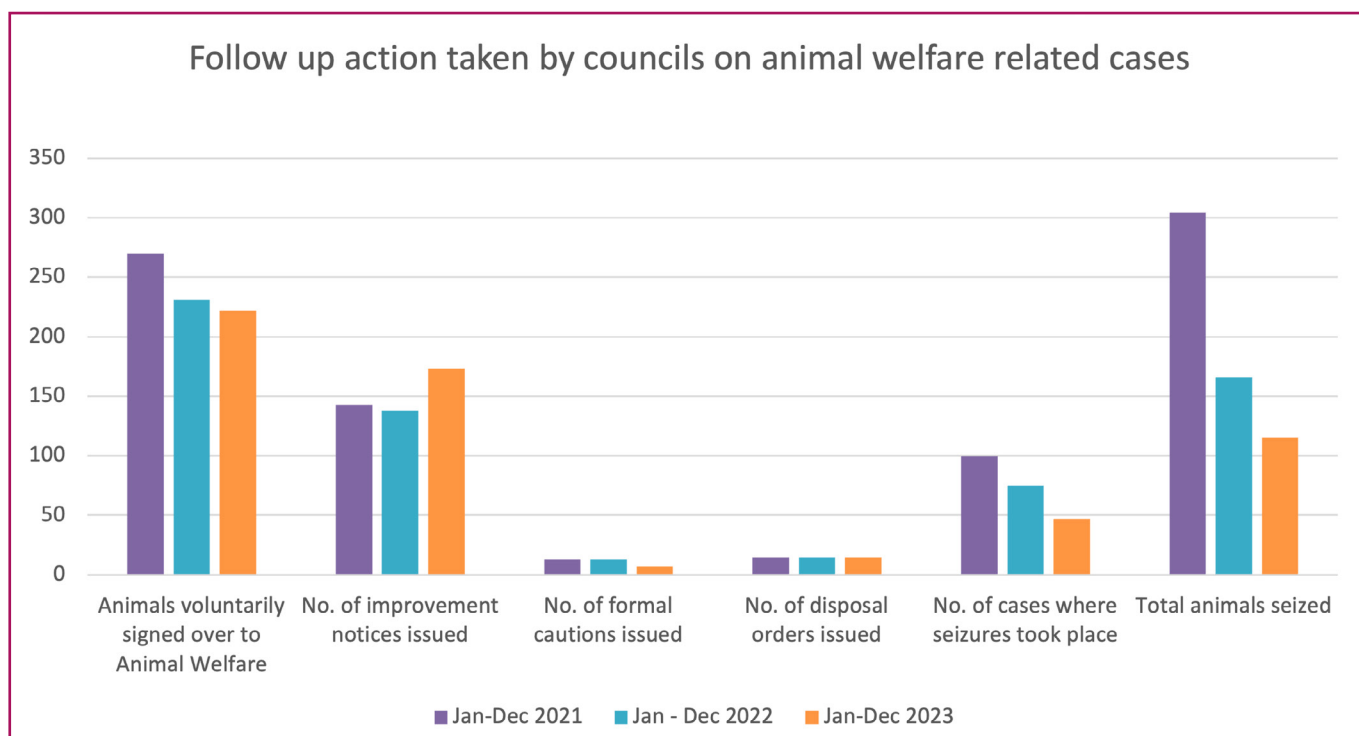
The 2011 Act places a statutory obligation on local councils to enforce animal welfare requirements in respect of non-farmed animals, for example, domestic pets of any vertebrate species and equines. Councils have adopted a collaborative regional approach to delivering its animal welfare service with Council appointed Animal Welfare Officers enforcing the Act. These officers have statutory enforcement powers and can take a range of action to improve the welfare of non-farmed animals including: providing advice; issuing Improvement Notices; taking animals into their possession (in extreme cases of suffering), and initiating prosecution action. The following information outlines the enforcement action taken by local councils during 2023.

Breakdown of complaints received by Animal Welfare sections of local councils and visits carried out.	Jan - Dec 2021	Jan - Dec 2022	Jan - Dec 2023
Number of complaints received.	5916	6690	7105
Number of complaints received established to be non-welfare related cases.	1042	1055	813
Number of complaints received established to be animal welfare related cases.	4874	5556	6284
Number of visits carried out (some cases may have required more than one visit).	7407	8011	9457
Number of cases established to be unfounded/ malicious following visits by animal welfare officers.	295	240	67

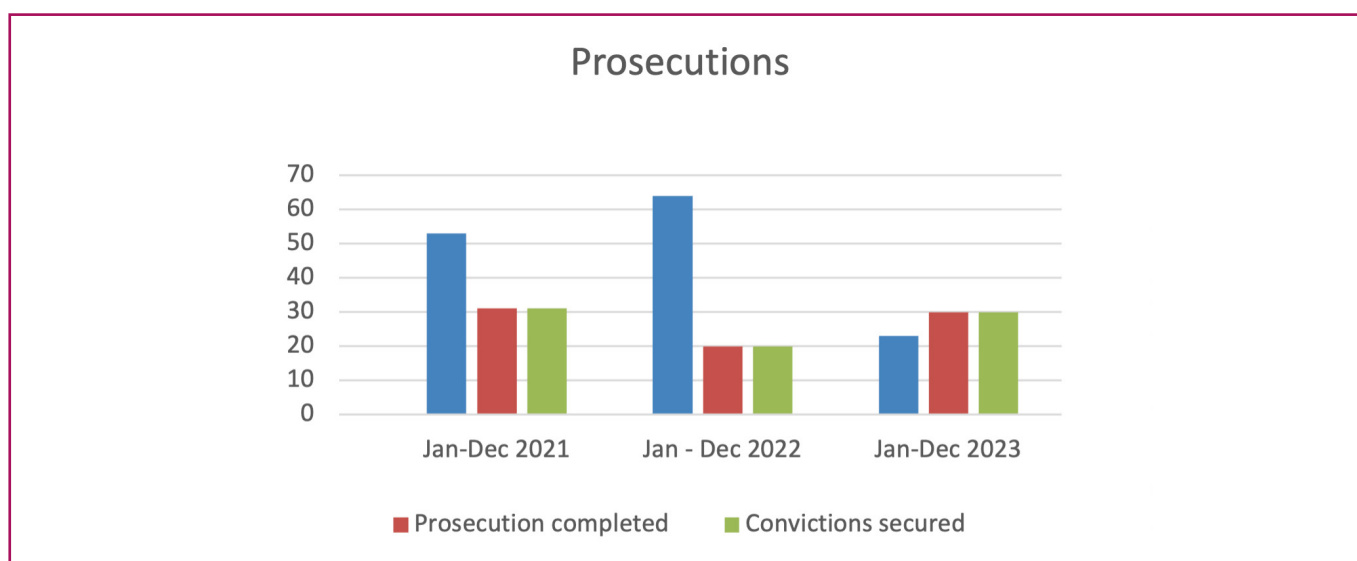


Follow up action taken by Animal Welfare sections of Councils on animal welfare related cases.	Jan - Dec 2021	Jan - Dec 2022	Jan - Dec 2023
Animals voluntarily signed over to local councils.	270	231	222
Number of improvement notices issued.	143	138	173
Number of formal cautions issued.	13	13	7
Number of disposal orders issued.	14	14	14
Number of cases where seizures took place.	100	75	47
Total number of animals seized.	304	166	115

*** All contact visits received informal advice, unless they resulted in formal action.**



Prosecutions by councils.	Jan - Dec 2021	Jan - Dec 2022	Jan - Dec 2023
Prosecution actions commenced.	53	64	23
Prosecution completed.	31	20	30
Convictions secured.	31	20	30



Prosecutions completed may also refer to prosecutions commenced in a previous year.

The 30 convictions in 2023 resulted in a variety of penalties comprising of fines, liability for costs, community service, conditional discharge, restrictions or bans on keeping animals and custodial sentences.

Breakdown of follow up action taken by councils on non-animal welfare related cases.	Jan - Dec 2021	Jan - Dec 2022	Jan - Dec 2023
Number referred to DAERA, (e.g. farmed animal complaints).	97	115	73
Number referred to dog wardens (e.g. stray dogs).	422	497	423
Number referred to Environmental Health (e.g. dirty yards/noise complaints).	47	49	27
Number referred to PSNI (e.g. animal fighting/snared animals/straying on roads).	51	49	32
Number classified as others (e.g. queries relating to rehoming or adopting referred to animal sanctuaries).	425	345	258

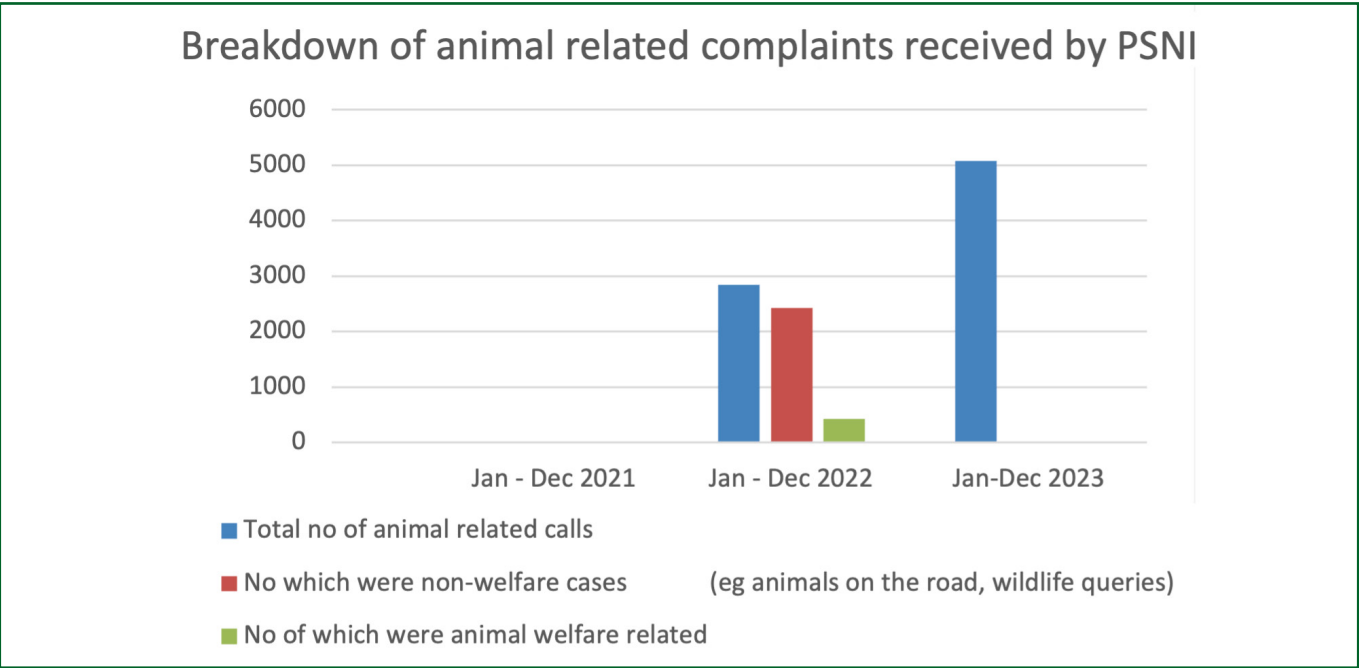


Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI)

The 2011 Act gives the PSNI power to deal with animal fighting. In addition to its responsibilities under the 2011 Act, the PSNI has responsibility for animals on roads and wildlife crime. It also deals with offences involving wild animals and other animal-related criminal activities.

Breakdown of complaints received by PSNI and enforcement action taken.	Jan - Dec 2021*	Jan - Dec 2022	Jan - Dec 2023
Number of complaints received which were in respect of animal related incidents.	Not available	2844	5078
Number of complaints which were in respect of non-welfare cases (e.g. animals on the road, wildlife queries).	Not available	2421	Not available
Number of complaints which were established to be animal welfare related.	Not available	423	Not available

*Please note these stats are not a recordable offence through the Home Office.



Follow up enforcement actions taken by PSNI.	Jan - Dec 2021	Jan - Dec 2022	Jan - Dec 2023
Number of incidents which led to seizure.	41	56	63
Total number of animals seized.	79	152	88
Number of offences prosecuted.	23	37	49
Number of prosecutions resulting in conviction.	13	12	13
Penalties incurred in relation to the convictions.	1 probation order 3 monetary penalties 2 prison committals 1 crown court imprisonment 5 suspended sentences 1 prohibition from keeping animals		

A variety of actions were taken by PSNI on the reported animal welfare/cruelty related cases.
For example:

- information/advice dispensed with no visit required;
- visits were carried out and information/advice was dispensed; and
- referrals made to another agency as appropriate e.g. local council or DAERA.

Please refer to the DAERA website for further information on animal welfare.

Animal Welfare Enforcement Roles

The Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, (the 2011 Act), is enforced by DAERA (Livestock), Councils (domestic pets) and PSNI (wildlife and fighting offences). The 2011 Act sets out a range of welfare offences for which penalties may be imposed when a person has committed an offence set out in the legislation. The maximum penalty available in Northern Ireland for the most serious welfare offences is: five years imprisonment and/or an unlimited fine.

The 2011 Act enshrines the five needs of an animal in law: the need for a suitable environment; the need for a suitable diet; the need to be able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns; any need to be housed with or apart from, other animals; and the need to be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease. On occasions this can merit an improvement notice that the enforcement bodies can issue and follow up on.

Enforcement bodies: (DAERA, Councils and PSNI) investigate all animal welfare related complaints and have statutory enforcement powers to take a range of actions when investigating a complaint. Action taken will be determined by the severity of the incident. Actions can include giving advice; issuing verbal warnings; issuing improvement notices (except PSNI); and, in extreme cases of suffering, taking animals into their possession and initiating prosecution action.

Enforcement bodies are unable to comment on any active or ongoing investigations.

The Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) is responsible for farmed animals (any animal bred or kept for the production of food, wool or skin or for other farming purposes).

Councils are responsible for enforcement in respect of non-farmed animals i.e. domestic pets and equines (e.g. horses and donkeys etc).

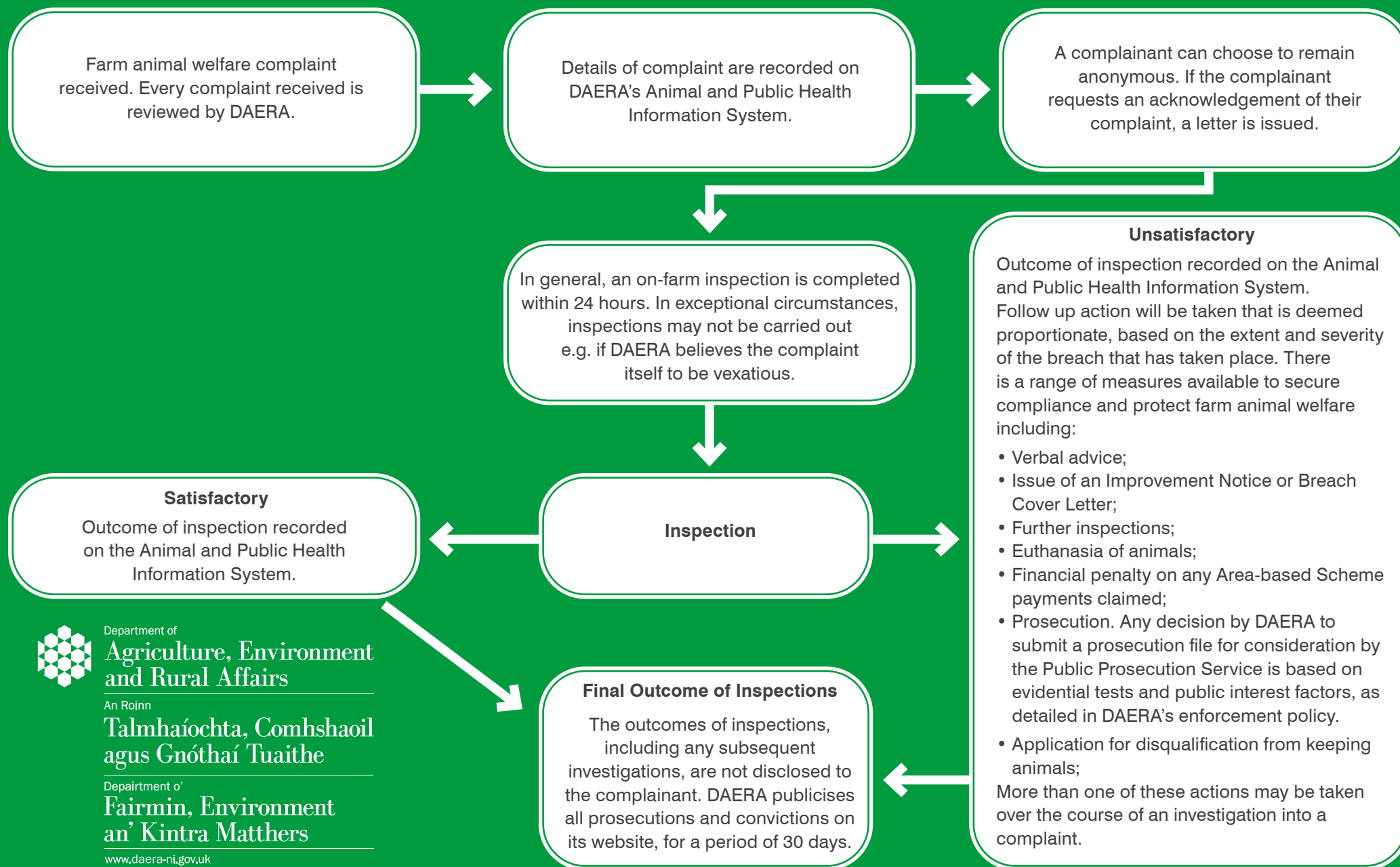
PSNI enforce section 8 of the 2011 Act for animal fighting such as badger baiting, dog fighting or cockerel fighting. The PSNI is also responsible for wildlife crime which can include poisoning of wild birds and illegal trapping of wildlife.

If you wish to speak to someone regarding the welfare of farmed animals please contact DAERA:
During office hours - Monday to Friday
9am-5pm telephone - 0300 200 7840
At weekends - contact a local Private Veterinary Practice or a local Police Station who will, as necessary, refer the welfare complaint to the relevant DAERA "on call" officer.

If you wish to speak to someone regarding the welfare of non-farmed animals i.e. domestic pets, horses, donkeys please [contact your local Council](#).
At weekends and over holiday periods contact the same number and your call will be diverted to an answering service.

If you wish to make a complaint about animal fighting you should contact the PSNI on 101, or online at www.psni.police.uk or anonymously using Crimestoppers: 0800 555 111.
PSNI can also investigate organised crime and economic crime involving animals and work with DAERA and Councils to do so.

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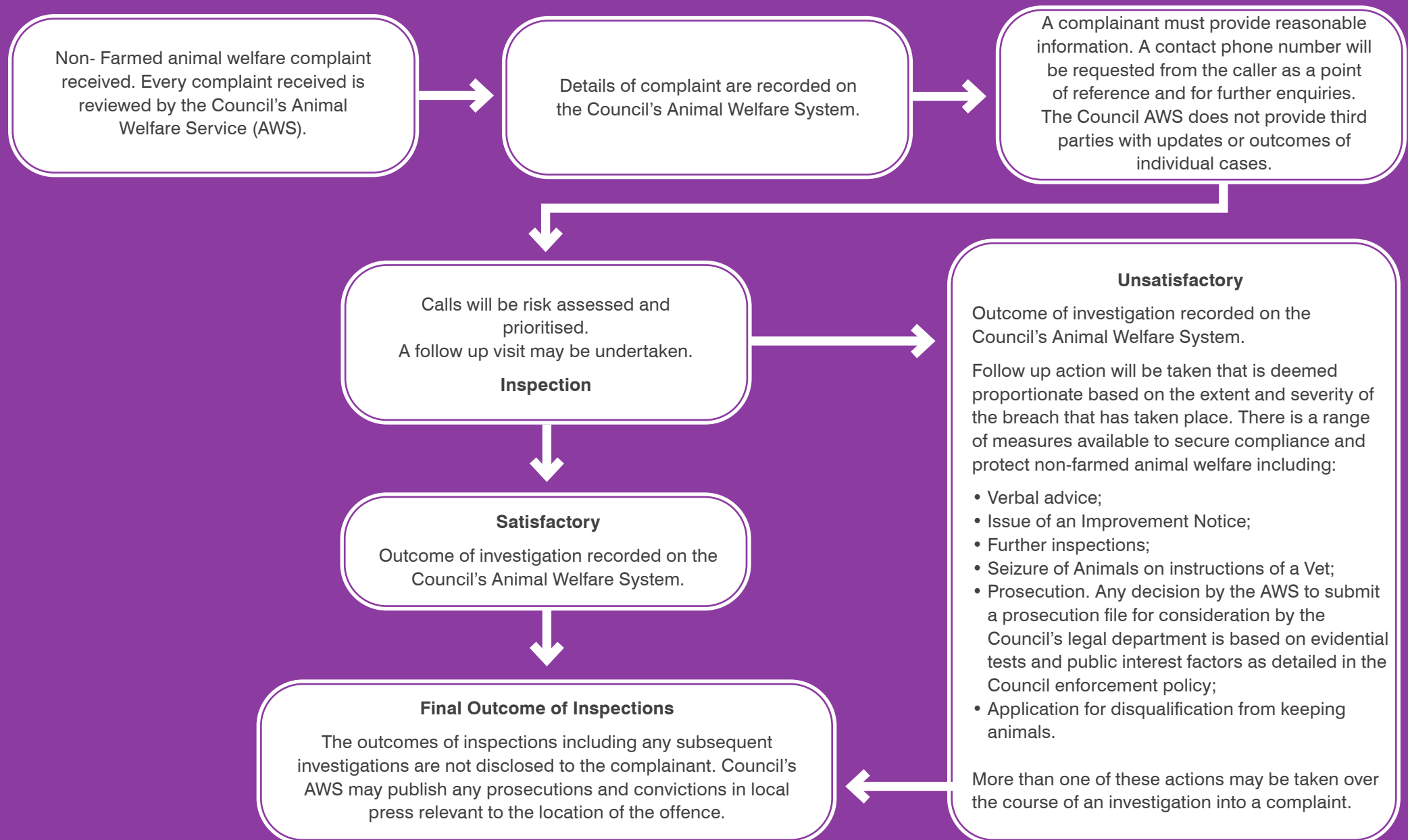
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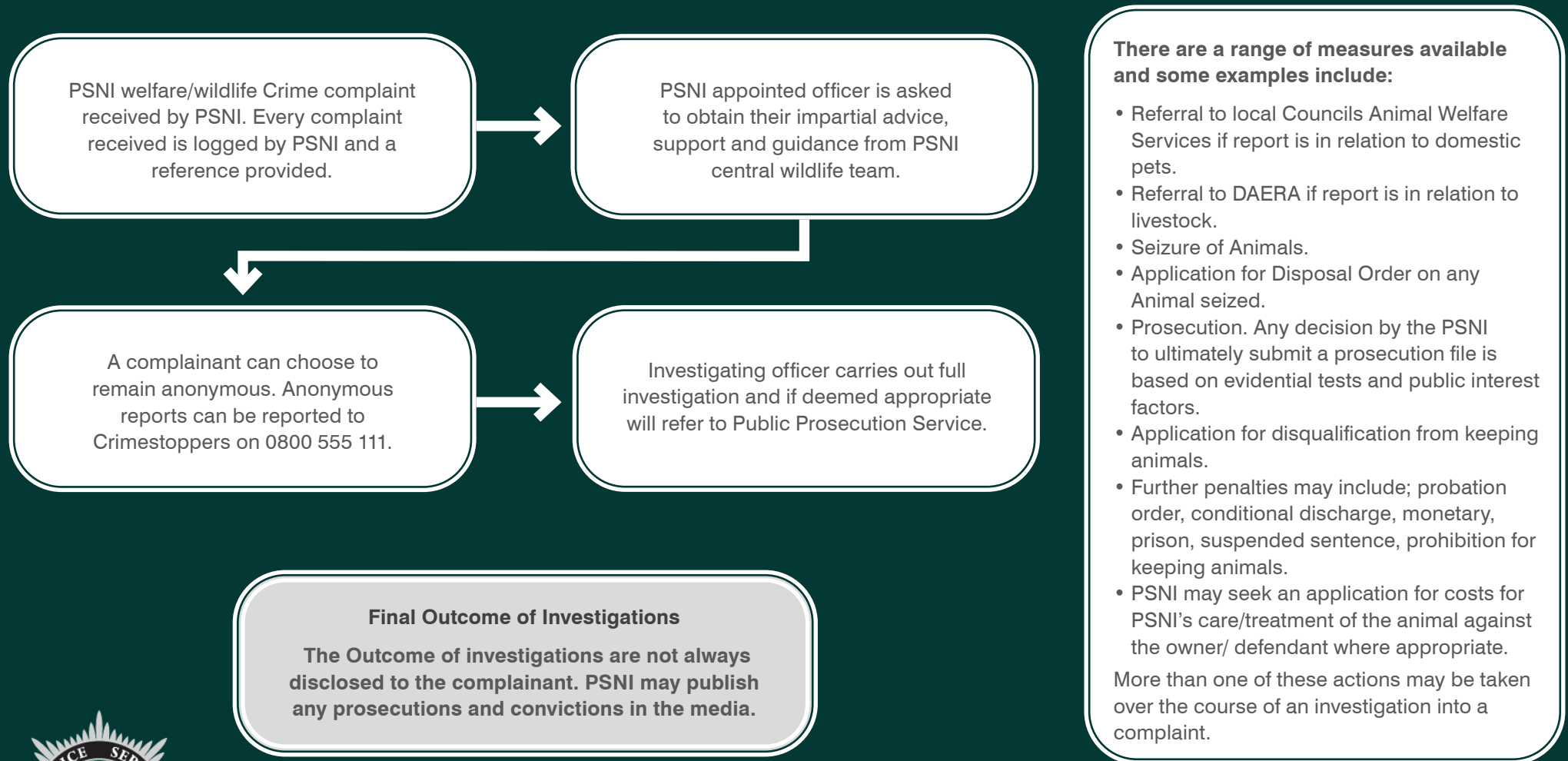
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NI Councils



Police Service of NI (PSNI) Central Wildlife/Animal Welfare Team





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