



ANIMAL WELFARE ASSISTANCE POLICY

The RSPCA is the leading UK animal welfare charity, specialising in the rescue, rehabilitation and rehoming of animals in the greatest need and the prevention of cruelty.

Your local RSPCA Branch (Sussex North and Brighton Branch) is committed to animal welfare and recognises how much pet ownership benefits people. The relationships we have with our pets improve our wellbeing both mentally and physically. Sharing your home with a pet can have positive beneficial effects on stress, anxiety and depression, and feelings of loneliness by providing companionship.

Pets help people in so many ways and they depend entirely on us for their needs in terms of food, shelter, emotional wellbeing and to live free of pain and suffering. RSPCA Sussex North & Brighton Branch cares about your pets and if you are struggling financially and need support with your pet we are here to help you. We are able to provide pet food, animal welfare and pet care advice, and, subject to certain **eligibility criteria**, we may also be able to give assistance with spaying and neutering, micro-chipping, veterinary care and behavioural support, ensuring pets do not suffer due to their owners' financial difficulties.

The purpose of this policy is to set out the principles, criteria and processes that determine how the RSPCA Sussex North & Brighton Branch manage requests for financial assistance.

Emergency Veterinary Treatment

Our Branch does not run our own clinic and cannot offer an emergency veterinary service. In the event of an emergency, you should seek treatment at either an animal charity hospital (PDSA) or private veterinary practice as this is in the best interest of the animal. We are able to provide a list of recommended veterinary practices within our Branch area and with whom we have a preferential charity relationship.

Eligibility for Welfare Assistance

To ensure that our resources are directed where there is most need, we will assess each request on a case-by-case basis prior to assistance being offered. All accepted requests will be offered a set contribution towards the required treatment. The level of assistance will be confirmed with you once we have all the necessary information.

The Branch contribution will be paid directly to the vet practice where treatment is undertaken. The Branch will specify the veterinary surgery that you will need to attend with your pet, this may mean that you need to attend a different surgery for your pet's treatment.

To be eligible to receive Welfare Assistance from the RSPCA Sussex North & Brighton Branch you must be over 18 and reside within the boundaries of the Branch area (*please check eligible postcodes*). You will need to be able to provide evidence of receiving certain benefits (*see below*), or have proof of low income. The Branch may decline neutering and welfare requests of any animal at their discretion, for example if we believe that an owner is breeding from an animal.

The Branch will offer assistance to a maximum number of animals per household at their discretion. There is a limit of financial assistance of £200 per animal. Please be aware that we cannot consider repeat welfare assistance requests.

Proof of Eligibility

Photographic proof of identity will be required and evidence of receipt of any of the following benefits:

- Housing Benefit
- Council Tax Benefit (not single persons reduction)
- Universal Credit
- Income related Job Seekers Allowance
- Income related Employment & Support Allowance
- Pension Credit

Pet details

In order to process and assess your request, you will also need to provide the Branch with full details of your pet's health. This will involve completing a form authorising your veterinary surgeon to disclose your pet's records to the Branch. Review of your pet's health records will assist with the assessment of your claim.

The Branch may also speak directly to your veterinary surgeon to obtain more information in relation to your request and any possible treatment required. The Branch may, however, require treatment to your pet to be carried out at a different veterinary surgery than your usual branch.

Excluded Treatment

Although each request is assessed on a case-by-case basis, our policy is that we are unable to provide assistance in relation to the following circumstances:

- Vaccines
- Referrals to specialist veterinary surgeons
- Tests that will not improve the clinical outcome for your animal
- Private cremation
- Euthanasia on behavioural or mental health ground
- Payment for retrospective veterinary treatment

Additional Costs

Depending on the treatment required, any additional costs associated with before or after care for your pet, will be the responsibility of the owner of the animal. Any estimate given by a vet can only be approximate as the treatment provided will vary according to how your pet responds. The Branch may not cover the cost of any subsequent consultations, examinations, treatment or prescriptions required for your animal.

The Branch reserves the right to require you to contribute towards the cost of the treatment under the Welfare Assistance scheme and this will be determined on a case-by-case basis. The decision of the Branch in relation to any contribution required by you is final and binding.

Since 2016 in England & Wales it has been a legal requirement for all dogs over the age of 8 weeks to be micro-chipped. This legal requirement for microchipping also applies to cats from 2023. If your cat or dog is not already chipped, we will be unable to do a neuter (under our neutering policy) unless you choose to chip as well. It is your responsibility to register your pet's micro chip and keep your details up to date on the microchip database.

Post Operation

Owners need to be aware that there are risks with any surgery and post-operative complications can occur. Treatment to resolve these will be the owners responsibility.

Responsibility

It is the pet owner's legal responsibility to ensure the health and wellbeing of their pet at all times. Any successful, or unsuccessful, application for financial assistance under this policy does not confer any responsibility for the animal to the Branch. In the event that financial assistance is provided, the owner retains the control of their pet and any final decision for veterinary treatment remains within the sole remit of the owner.

Other Options

There is never a need to abandon a pet and our aspiration is that every pet should enjoy a healthy life in a happy home.

Most pet owners feel a responsibility to protect the health and wellbeing of the animals in their care, and when household circumstances change such as loss of employment, rent increases, changes to benefits or ill health, it is often then that people are forced to consider giving up their pets at a time when they are most needed.

Our aim is to enable pet owners to keep their pet(s) with them, as the best place for a pet is in the home and not a rehoming centre. However, we recognise that in some circumstances owners may no longer be able to cope or care for their pets and in those situations we will support people to make the choice that is right for them and their pet. In the circumstance where a pet is signed over to the Branch, we will seek to match them with new families to meet the pet's individual needs.

Entire Agreement

When you apply for financial assistance under this policy you agree and accept that the Branch reviews each application on a case-by-case basis. Although the Branch does seek to provide assistance it is unfortunately not possible for the Branch to

accept every application. Any decision made by the Branch is therefore final and binding.

By applying for assistance under this policy and completing the forms required by the Branch you are accepting the terms of this policy and accept that the Branch are not providing any services or goods to you.

How we use your information

If you register to receive financial assistance for your animal(s), our Branch will collect and use the details you give to process your request. We need to keep a record of your name and address, what animals you own, details of your eligibility (as above) and your contact details. We may also record details of your animal's treatment.

Your personal data will be treated in confidence in accordance with data protection regulations. Your personal data will be kept for seven years. You can view our privacy policy on our website.

The person responsible for this policy/procedure is: The Branch Manager

This policy has been approved by the Board of Trustees at the committee meeting held on 13 December 2022. This policy will be reviewed on an annual basis by the Board of Trustees.

	Review Date	Amendments	Next Review
1	December 2023		
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