

**CODE OF RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE
WELFARE OF PET RABBITS**

**DUTY OF CARE TO A PET RABBIT UNDER THE
ANIMAL WELFARE (GUERNSEY) ORDINANCE, 2012**

Section 8 of the Animal Welfare (Guernsey) Ordinance, 2012 provides that the owner or keeper of an animal owes a duty to take such care as, in all circumstances, is reasonable to see that the animal is free –

- from thirst, hunger and malnutrition,
- from discomfort,
- from pain, injury and disease,
- from fear and distress, and
- to express normal behaviour patterns.

In determining what care is reasonable in all the circumstances described above, the owner or keeper of an animal shall have particular regard to -

- (a) good practice for the care of the animal in question,
- (b) any lawful purpose for which the animal is kept,
- (c) any lawful activity carried on in relation to the animal,
- (d) the physical activity undertaken by the animal,
- (e) seasonal climatic conditions,
- (f) the life-stage of the animal, and
- (g) any special or additional dietary and nutritional requirements that may arise -
 - (i) where the animal is pregnant, brooding or rearing young, and

- (ii) from the general state of health of the animal.

"**normal behaviour patterns**" means normal behaviour patterns for a domestic animal or a captive animal, as the case may be, of the kind concerned.

The duty of care includes providing the animal with -

- (a) a supply of fresh drinking water and food of sufficient quantity and quality to keep the animal in good health,
- (b) where appropriate, suitable shelter which is sufficient to maintain the animal in good health and such shelter must include -
 - (i) access from the shelter to water and food,
 - (ii) sufficient space for the animal to lie down or otherwise rest in comfort, and
 - (iii) where appropriate, adequate light, heat and ventilation,
- (c) protection from injury, disease or unnecessary suffering including, where appropriate, providing timely and appropriate medical diagnosis and treatment where necessary by a recognised veterinary surgeon, and
- (d) the opportunity to express normal behaviour patterns and living conditions that are conducive to maintaining those normal behaviour patterns.

The Welfare Recommendations below provide practical guidance on meeting this duty of care when caring for a pet rabbit.

RECOMMENDATIONS MADE UNDER SECTION 13(1) OF THE ANIMAL WELFARE (GUERNSEY) ORDINANCE, 2012 FOR THE WELFARE OF PET RABBITS

A FAILURE TO COMPLY WITH THE WELFARE RECOMMENDATIONS MAY BE RELIED UPON IN COURT AS TENDING TO ESTABLISH LIABILITY FOR FAILING TO MEET THE DUTY OF CARE

RECOMMENDATIONS – FOOD AND WATER

1. A rabbit should be provided with food that contains the correct balance of essential nutrients, in sufficient quantity to keep it, in all circumstances, in good health and vigour.
2. A rabbit should be provided with fresh, clean water in sufficient quantity to keep it, in all circumstances, hydrated.

RECOMMENDATIONS - LIVING ENVIRONMENT

3. As a minimum a rabbit should be provided with living accommodation that –
 - a. is large enough to allow it to lie down and rest or sleep in a natural posture,
 - b. is large enough to provide it with space, other than the place in which it rests and sleeps, to stand up on four legs, stand up on its back legs, stretch, hop three paces unhindered and turn around in a normal posture,
 - c. provides it with shelter that is predator and vermin proof, dry, ventilated, but protected from draughts and which provides protection from direct sunlight and extremes of heat and cold,
 - d. provides daylight or light equivalent to daylight during normal daylight hours,

- e. allows continuous access to water and appropriate access to food (to ensure it receives a sufficient quantity of food as required to meet the duty of care), and
- f. is constructed from materials that are not hazardous to rabbits.

RECOMMENDATIONS - HEALTH

4. A rabbit that is injured or ill should be provided with timely and appropriate treatment for the injury or illness or in the case of a serious injury or illness, medical diagnosis and treatment by a veterinary surgeon. In the case of doubt, advice should be obtained from a veterinary surgeon.
5. Veterinary medicines or treatments should only be administered in accordance with the directions of a veterinary surgeon or a person authorised to supply such products, or in the case of products that can be purchased by the general public, in accordance with the directions of the manufacturer of the product.
6. Hazardous substances should be kept out of the areas to which a rabbit normally has access.
7. A rabbit should be protected from hazardous appliances (household and garden) by keeping such appliances out of the areas to which it normally has access or by using measures to ensure it does not suffer harm from the appliances.
8. A rabbit should be given the opportunity to exercise to keep it in good health and vigour.
9. A rabbit's coat should be checked regularly for mats and external parasites and, if necessary, mats should be removed and parasites treated.
10. A rabbit's nails should be checked regularly and excessive growth should be clipped.
11. A rabbit should be provided with a high fibre diet and untreated wood or twigs to gnaw on to prevent its teeth from becoming overgrown.

12. A rabbit should be handled so as to avoid distress or injury.

13. Food and water containers that are provided for a rabbit should be kept clean of waste food, droppings and other contamination.

RECOMMENDATION - BEHAVIOUR

14. A rabbit should be provided with the opportunity to regularly socialise with its owner or keeper or other rabbits.

RECOMMENDATIONS - BREEDING

15. Only a rabbit that is adult, well developed, in good health and condition and with a favourable temperament should be used for breeding.

16. Bucks should be removed from a doe after mating and should not be kept with young when they are born.

17. A female that is due to give birth should be provided with an area that is safe, warm, dry and quiet and also provided with clean bedding material. It should be inspected frequently to ensure that it is not experiencing difficulties, but otherwise disturbed as little as possible. If a female exhibits any signs of significant difficulties, during pregnancy or birth, veterinary assistance should be sought promptly.

18. A young rabbit should be able to feed independently and be in good health and condition before it is re-homed.

RECOMMENDATION - EXHIBITING RABBITS

19. A rabbit that is exhibited should be at least 5 months of age, in good health and free from injuries or skin parasites. A pregnant rabbit should not be exhibited.

RECOMMENDATIONS – TRANSPORTATION

20. A rabbit that is transported in a vehicle should be restrained in a secure container.

21. A travelling container should be large enough to allow a rabbit to stand up, turn around and lie down with ease. It should be provided with bedding and food, including moisture-rich food. A container should be secured within the vehicle and positioned so that a rabbit is not exposed to extremes of temperature, drafts or high humidity.

22. A rabbit should not be left unattended in a vehicle unless the environment within the vehicle is maintained below 20°C air temperature in the shade.

23. A rabbit should not spend more than 8 consecutive hours confined in a vehicle or travelling container per day.

Further, more detailed guidance for the welfare of pet rabbits is set out in "Guidance for the Welfare of Pet Rabbits" issued by the Commerce and Employment Department and available on the States of Guernsey website. That guidance does not form part of this Code.