



Registered charity no. 219099

## Guidelines for the design and management of animal shelters





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**ABOVE: Hungarian wire-haired vizsla**

**BELOW: Kitten in an RSPCA animal centre**



# INTRODUCTION

The RSPCA (Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals) is the world's oldest animal welfare organisation. Founded in 1824, the Society aims to prevent cruelty and promote kindness to animals. The RSPCA is a charity that has grown into an organisation with more than 110 animal shelters and clinics, as well as specialised veterinary and wildlife hospitals. The RSPCA's 323 inspectors investigate reports of cruelty, offer advice and information in most cases, or prosecute under UK law when appropriate. The RSPCA also provides advice and support to nearly 400 organisations in 80 countries around the world.

The purpose of this booklet is to set out all the areas to consider when building an animal shelter. The booklet stresses the fact that building a shelter may not be the best solution in every situation and suggests some alternative projects to consider – see *Section 1: Is building an animal shelter the right option?*

## ANIMALS' NEEDS

All animals must carry out basic life processes and therefore have basic needs. Humans and non-human animals share these basic needs, which can be grouped into five areas:

1. **Physiological needs** – e.g. food and water, appropriate temperature/humidity, air and light conditions etc.
2. **Social needs** – preference for living in solitude, in pair bonds or in a group.
3. **Psychological needs** – appropriate stimulation and activity to prevent boredom.
4. **Environmental needs** – suitable home, space and territory.
5. **Behavioural needs** – e.g. hibernation, nest building, burrowing.

Animals in captivity, such as pets or animals in a shelter or zoo, are entirely dependent upon humans to provide the conditions that will satisfy their basic needs. It is therefore important that anyone looking after animals is aware of all their needs.

## THE FIVE FREEDOMS

The RSPCA believes that the welfare of animals must take into account five essential 'freedoms'. These five freedoms form the basis of the RSPCA's policy on animal welfare. They were first developed by the UK government's independent advisory body on farm animals, the Farm Animal Welfare Council, but they provide a useful benchmark for the welfare of animals in shelters too.

### FREEDOM FROM HUNGER AND THIRST

By providing ready access to fresh water and a balanced diet that maintains health and vigour.

### FREEDOM FROM PAIN, INJURY AND DISEASE

By prevention or rapid diagnosis and treatment.

### FREEDOM FROM FEAR AND DISTRESS

By ensuring conditions and treatment which avoid mental suffering.

### FREEDOM FROM DISCOMFORT

By providing an appropriate environment including shelter and a comfortable resting and sleeping area.

### FREEDOM TO EXPRESS NORMAL BEHAVIOUR

By providing sufficient space, proper facilities and appropriate company of the animals' own kind.

Kennel block at Java animal shelter, Portugal



# SECTION 1: IS BUILDING AN ANIMAL SHELTER THE RIGHT OPTION?

Although many organisations see an animal shelter as the most pressing need for their community, this is not always the case. Shelters are expensive to run and require a great deal of planning and organisation. In addition, building a shelter will not, on its own, solve a stray control problem in the long term. In fact it may make it worse, as it provides an easy route for pet owners to dispose of their animals rather than think about providing for them.

Before deciding to build a shelter, you must be aware of the needs within the area that you serve. You will need to undertake a preliminary assessment of the situation, as part of which you should consider:

- the existing shelters in the region, their capacity and the area they serve
- the number of animals that required help in the area over the previous few years, and whether a pattern or trend can be identified
- the area the new shelter would serve
- an estimate of the population of stray dogs and cats in that region
- existing stray collection programmes, how they are carried out and by whom
- the financial situation in the area, e.g. whether you are likely to be able to fund the shelter from public donations or local authority funding
- if you enter a contract on stray animals whether it is financially viable, and if it would be good for your society's image to be collecting and possibly euthanasing strays
- the local attitude to dogs and cats.

**It may be that, on closer examination, building a shelter is not the way you will be able to help the most animals.**

Crowded kennel



RSPCA INTERNATIONAL

## CASE STUDY 1

*When residents of an east Asian city with one of the greatest human population densities in the world established an animal welfare organisation, it presented a number of difficulties for the individuals involved. The scarcity of space created a very serious problem for anyone intending to establish a physical shelter for stray, abandoned and abused animals.*

*In the past a number of animal rescue groups had devoted substantial enthusiasm and financial resources to opening shelters, but the number of unwanted animals dumped at their doors overwhelmed the shelters within weeks. In a society where fundraising is underdeveloped, the scale of the stray animal problem soon led to financial difficulties for the shelters. This in turn led to a dramatic fall in the standard of care. Poor rates of rehoming in the city left many animals spending their entire lives in 'no-kill' shelters that failed to provide adequate food, space, heating and veterinary care. In many instances, shelter staff and volunteers were left traumatised by the conditions in which they were working.*

*The new organisation focused on creating a foster network of dedicated volunteers to take abandoned dogs and cats into their homes temporarily. For its part, the organisation agreed to support the animals, paying for all medical bills, vaccinations and neutering, until long-term homes were found.*

*In the first year the organisation built up a network of more than 40 foster homes with the goal to reach 100 within the second year. The animals are rehomed via the internet, and the network has the potential to house a far greater number of animals than a shelter ever could. The animals are all homed in appropriate conditions and the scheme has far lower overheads and administrative costs than a shelter.*

*The new organisation has become a success in a city where many similar projects have failed.*

## CASE STUDY 2

RSPCA International is often approached by associate organisations complaining about the poor state of the municipality's provision for stray animals in their city. Attention is normally focused on inhumane animal catching methods and the extremely low rehoming rates at the municipal shelters. Many groups want to open a new shelter to compete with the municipal facility. One animal welfare organisation in Eastern Europe decided to take an alternative approach. The group studied the legal framework governing stray animals, lobbied the local authorities and urged them to improve conditions there. Through understanding the law and working with officials, the group was able to highlight the local authority's responsibility for the welfare of animals in its care.

The organisation persuaded the local authority to arrange a fact-finding visit for the officials to study methods of stray control in the UK. The visit impressed upon the authorities that they were not providing appropriate care for those pets abandoned by irresponsible owners, underlined the lack of skilled staff at the municipal shelter and highlighted other measures that could be adopted to reduce the rate of abandonment.

Following the visit, the officials asked RSPCA International to deliver an animal handling and shelter management course. In the two years since lobbying started, the local authority has built a new shelter to international standards and specifications. The shelter's original manager has been replaced by a qualified vet, who fully endorsed the need for trained shelter staff.

## IS OPENING A SHELTER THE RIGHT OPTION?

What are the welfare problems in the area?  
Assess the situation.

- Stray animals?
- Local municipality has an inhumane way of dealing with stray or unwanted animals?
- Lack of animal welfare promotion in your region?

### Assessing the problem

1. What is the view of the local residents?
2. What is the view of local businesses?
3. What is the view of the local municipality?
4. What legislation is there in place?
5. Is there an animal welfare facility already in place – possible collaboration?

### Common difficulties

- Funding – fundraising.
- Location – land and building permission.
- Local support – poor public relations.
- Volunteers – attracting and keeping them.
- Disease control – veterinary care.
- Policies.
- Internal disagreements.

### Alternatives

1. Cat neutering clinic.
2. Microchipping scheme.
3. Pet registration scheme.
4. Education.
5. Awareness programme.
6. Collaboration with an existing shelter.
7. Fostering.

## SECTION 2: ESTABLISHING SHELTER POLICIES

There are a number of policy decisions that need to be taken by your organisation before you begin to build a shelter, because they will shape many other factors such as how many animals you can house and what facilities you will need to include in the building plans.

The most important policy decisions are on neutering, rehoming and euthanasia. These are all emotive subjects, but taking time to set clear policies on these issues at an early stage will ensure that money is not wasted in building a shelter that does not meet your needs.

The establishment of policies helps to guide an organisation's work and will shape the day-to-day running of your shelter. The policies at your shelter should represent the considered position held by your organisation on particular issues and will reflect the principles your organisation sees as important.

**Benefits of establishing shelter policies:**

- sets, maintains and monitors standards
- ensures continuity of animal care
- prevents misunderstanding and confusion for staff and supporters
- ensures compliance with relevant legislation.

There are several alternate options to consider when developing policies on neutering, rehoming and euthanasia.

### NEUTERING

Neutering animals, although very desirable for population-control purposes, is expensive. Your organisation will need to weigh up the costs of neutering against the benefits before deciding on your shelter's policy. The RSPCA recommends neutering all animals before rehoming them.

The RSPCA advocates the neutering of domestic cats and dogs and other domestic animals as an important part of responsible ownership.

#### Option 1: Not neutering shelter animals

This option would contribute to the population control problem and could result in a second generation of animals arriving at your shelter that, in turn, could aggravate the over-crowding problem. Not neutering animals could also lead to heightened aggression between animals in the shelter. On the positive side, this option is cheaper for the shelter.

#### Option 2: Neutering all animals before rehoming

With this option, it is important to consider the cost – who will pay? The animals could be difficult to rehome if neutering is seen as 'unnatural' or if the costs are passed on to the adopters. However, the animals will be healthier and it will also contribute to controlling the population. Also your local vet may be willing to perform the neutering at cost price or give a discount for bulk work.

#### Option 3: Neutering only male animals

It is less expensive to neuter males than females, since the surgery required for males is much simpler. Neutering the males will help to prevent disease, fighting and roaming.

#### Option 5: Neutering only female animals

This option is more expensive than neutering males, however, the benefits are that it reduces the risk of pyometra (infection of the uterus) and may improve chances to rehome as the female will not come into season.

Neutering policy being put into practice in Sri Lanka



## REHOMING

Your rehoming policy will directly affect the length of time animals spend in your shelter. Consequently the policy has a great influence on the overall capacity of your shelter. By specifying certain criteria for potential adopters, you will reduce the number of acceptable homes. However, careful rehoming can reduce the likelihood of animals being poorly cared for, returned to the shelter or abandoned.

In planning your rehoming policy you should consider the following options.

### **Option 1: Rehoming animals only to homes meeting certain criteria (e.g. having fenced yards).**

This option could potentially lose your shelter good homes for animals and could also be seen as socially or culturally discriminatory.

### **Option 2: Rehoming animals only after a home visit has been carried out.**

A home visit is used to establish whether the adopter's environment is suitable. However, it is labour intensive and delays the rehoming process. Also some cultures would find the concept of home visits unacceptable, so you would need to consider if they are appropriate in your country.

### **Option 3: Rehoming to people that can afford to pay an adoption fee.**

Adoption fees generate funds for the shelter and also indicate a level of commitment from the adopter. Also, if potential adopters are unable to pay an adoption fee, they are unlikely to be able to cover costs such as veterinary treatment in the future. However, paying an adoption fee would be no guarantee of providing a good home. Animals could be returned and the shelter may even be seen as a commercial enterprise. Fees can put some people off adopting in some countries, or be financially difficult.

### **Option 4: Rehoming only after interviewing potential adopters.**

This will enable you to identify unsuitable adopters, and will also enable the shelter to match the adopter to a suitable animal. The interview will also provide the opportunity to confirm the adopter's understanding of pet ownership. However, this process can be time consuming.

**Setting strict conditions on who may adopt an animal will restrict the number of potential homes, but it will ultimately ensure good care is offered in these homes.**

*See Section 4: Establishing shelter routines for the RSPCA's rehoming procedures.*

## EUTHANASIA

Deciding under what circumstances an animal will be euthanased is undoubtedly one of the most difficult policy decisions that your organisation will have to make. In planning your euthanasia policy, as well as taking account of the law in your country, you should also consider the pros and cons of the following options.

### **Option 1: A no-kill policy.**

This option could prolong the suffering of sick or injured animals and could also result in the spread of disease. The shelter could turn into a long-term sanctuary, and although this may produce good public relations because many of the general public still perceive euthanasia as cruel, you run the risk of over-crowding or needing to turn animals away. If your organisation is committed to animal welfare having a no kill policy is not a viable option. In countries where there is a large stray or street population, the shelter will quickly become over crowded unless the capacity is adhered to and animals will die from fighting or disease, which is far more cruel than euthanasia by a vet.

### **Option 2: Euthanasia of terminally ill animals only.**

This option would reduce the suffering of sick animals and also reduce the spread of disease. It would result in a healthier population at the shelter and would also reduce the vet fees.

### **Option 3: Euthanasia of animals that cannot be rehomed (e.g. aggressive animals).**

This could produce poor public relations for your shelter, however it would prevent long-term kennel stress and would also allow space and adoption of animals that can be rehomed. It would also prevent the shelter from getting a reputation for rehoming dangerous or problem animals.

### **Option 4: Euthanasia after animals have been at the shelter for a set time.**

This would reduce the potential for over-crowding at your shelter and the population would be healthier, as the risk of spread of disease would be lower. However, it could generate bad public relations and also means the cost of worming and vaccinating the euthanased animals has been unnecessary.

**If your organisation wishes to ensure maximum levels of adoption from your shelter, and there is a large problem with stray and unwanted animals, you may at times have to accept the need for the euthanasia of healthy animals. This decision should be made by assessing the likelihood of an animal being rehomed.**



Any time limit that is set should take into account:

- the shelter's capacity
- the amount of time staff or volunteers can spend with each animal to ensure it remains sociable and therefore suitable for rehoming
- the pressure on kennel space due to incoming stray or unwanted dogs
- whether animals are kept in individual kennels or group housing
- your country's legislation that may prohibit euthanasia or set a maximum time limit.

The RSPCA is opposed to the euthanasia of fit and healthy animals. The Society nevertheless accepts with great reluctance, that in certain circumstances euthanasia may be necessary, in particular in the case of unwanted or stray animals for which good homes are not available.

Once policies have been agreed, care should be taken to monitor their effectiveness. At all times the welfare of the animals must be paramount. Even with the best intentions, an over-crowded or badly run shelter can cause great suffering to the very animals it is intended to help.

Areas to consider when establishing your shelter policies:

- aims
- benefits
- financial costs
- public opinion
- effectiveness
- staff.

It is important to consider the consequences these policies will have on your organisation as a whole and on issues such as finance and public opinion.

Your organisation will need to weigh up the actual cost of implementing the policy, against the perceived benefit.

Family looking at a dog waiting to be rehomed at an animal centre



ANDREW FORSYTH/RSPCA PHOTOLIBRARY

## SECTION 3: DESIGNING THE SHELTER

Running a shelter is a huge financial commitment, and a major responsibility. The greatest of care must therefore be taken in the planning stages to ensure that money is not wasted and that the shelter you build is the best possible within your financial constraints.

Your priorities should be:

- the needs of the animals and the safety of the staff and public
- the needs of the people looking after the animals
- the needs of the people visiting the shelter.

See the Checklist for planning an animal shelter at the end of this booklet.

### FINANCE

Shelters are expensive, both to build and run. Before you begin to build, provision should first be made for the following.

#### CAPITAL EXPENDITURE

These are items of non-recurring expenditure, such as:

- purchase of land
- consultants' fees (architects, surveyors etc.)
- building materials
- connection of services (electricity, water, drainage)
- equipment
- building a road.

Allowances will have to be made for replacement of equipment by allowing a sum for 'depreciation' in your accounts.

If you have a sum set aside for building your shelter, you should decide what proportion of it should be spent initially and how much should be invested to provide a regular income. It is better to run and build a small, good shelter than to build a large shelter that you cannot afford to run properly.

#### RUNNING COSTS

These comprise all items of day-to-day expenditure associated with your shelter. They will include:

- food
- depreciation
- insurance
- veterinary drugs/charges
- light/heat/water
- cleaning materials
- salaries and staff costs.

It is important to make a realistic assessment of these costs before you begin to construct your shelter.

#### INCOME

When preparing your financial plan for the shelter you must make a realistic estimate of your likely annual income. This will include all known sources of income, together with an estimation of how much you hope to fundraise. The welfare of the animals is of paramount importance, and they cannot be cared for without money.

### CASE STUDY 3

*In many countries local authorities have an obligation to finance a system to control stray animals within their municipality or region. Local authority contracts can provide regular income for an organisation running an animal shelter. This money can be used to cover the cost of food, cleaning, heating and equipment, as well as large grants to pay for building and maintenance work. However, money from a government contract comes with an obligation to provide a service and it is important to negotiate a contract that clearly outlines the responsibilities of both parties.*

*For a number of years an animal welfare group in Europe successfully ran small-scale projects in a city where provision for stray animals was severely lacking. The group's initial shelter project had been running well and it decided to expand its operations. An opportunity came when the local authority in a neighbouring city invited companies to bid for the right to provide its stray animal services. The animal welfare organisation decided to put forward its own proposal.*

*In an effort to win at all costs, the group repeatedly undercut the prices being offered by professional companies. While it had the best of intentions, the group undercut a number of companies with a proven track record of providing effective and humane services.*

*The local authority was able to remove an obligation to finance building work and purchase new equipment from the contract. The bid from the animal welfare organisation resulted in staff wages being lowered to unacceptable levels and also allowed the local authority to remove its obligation to cover the cost of vaccinations for the staff and animals. The organisation won the contract to run a shelter, but only in run-down facilities with poorly paid and unmotivated staff. The group eventually had to use funds and personnel from its original shelter to improve the second project and the standard of care at the original shelter dropped dramatically.*

After six months, the group withdrew from the contract at considerable financial and emotional cost to its organisation.

Before making a bid for a contract with a local authority, it is essential that you make an in-depth analysis of your bid to ensure it is good for your organisation, staff and the animals you care for, in the long-term. There will often be circumstances under which it is more appropriate to allow the contract to pass to another organisation. Your group can then monitor and support its operations.

## SITE SELECTION

- Should you lease or buy a site? Does the site have room for expansion?
- Is the site a minimum of 400 metres from the nearest residential housing? You will need to check local planning requirements.
- Is the site on high ground with good natural drainage?
- Can the site be easily reached by public transport? This may be important for your staff and for potential adopters.
- Can mains water/drainage/electricity be connected and at what cost?
- What building materials are readily available?
- What materials are recommended for local climatic conditions?
- Should you convert an existing building or build new?
- Conversions may be cheaper, but may not be as suitable as a purpose-built shelter.
- What are the opinions of the local people?

## CASE STUDY 4

RSPCA International has encountered many examples of animal shelters in inappropriate locations. Old municipal shelters are often built to poor standards and are located far away from the city centre and major transport links. All of these factors can contribute to low rehoming rates, higher levels of euthanasia and demoralising conditions for both visitors and staff. In an effort to rectify this situation some organisations have chosen to buy or lease land closer to the city centre. The pitfall here is that it is difficult to guarantee adequate space for any potential expansion.

This was underlined when an animal rescue organisation in Europe needed to undertake important renovation of its shelter. Despite strong support from the local authority, which had part-funded the shelter's running costs since its inception, the location of the shelter brought it into conflict with other organisations and developers. These two groups opposed the project vigorously. Resident groups usually dislike the loud noise levels created by an animal shelter near their property. The subsequent dispute over planning permission has been ongoing for three years without a satisfactory resolution. The financial implications of this dispute with the local authority may even jeopardise the shelter's very existence.

It is difficult to plan for unexpected events in the future, but it is essential to have a strategy that takes future needs of your animal shelter and organisation into account. It is important to ensure that your involvement in shelter work will not have a negative impact on the growth of your entire organisation. Therefore it is necessary to have secured the appropriate funding, space and resources to allow for the potential expansion of a shelter and it is vital to be an adequate distance from residential housing. Planning regulations vary from town to town, but an organisation should have a clear understanding of regulations before selecting the site for a new shelter.

## THE BUILDING – LAYOUT

When deciding the layout of your shelter, preventing the spread of disease must be your first priority. Incoming animals must be quarantined away from animals that are ready for rehoming. Isolation and quarantine areas must not be accessible to the general public.

### STAFF AND PUBLIC SPACES

1. **RECEPTION AREA:** You must consider every procedure and activity regularly undertaken here, including the traffic flow of people using this area. The reception area should give a good first impression and will therefore need to communicate a sense of order, and be light and clean.
2. **ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE:** This is the control centre for the shelter, and it should have direct access both to the reception area and the animal quarters. You will need to keep accurate records of all animals entering and leaving your shelter, so you must allow sufficient space for the storage of records, including future growth.
3. **MEDICAL/EUTHANASIA ROOM:** This should be adjacent to the isolation/quarantine facility to allow the easy movement of sick and recovering animals. There should be a separate entrance from outside and clear access for vehicles. There should be a separate ventilation system for this area, and there should be isolation units that prevent any physical contact between animals.
4. **CARCASS ROOM/COLD STORAGE:** This should be adjacent to the euthanasia room – a cold room, refrigerator or freezer may be required. Before deciding on the method that you will use to dispose of carcasses, you must check with the local authorities for any health and pollution regulations that may affect your choice. If you are going to have a crematorium on site, then a dedicated space must be set aside for this purpose. If disposal is to take place off the premises, then a larger cold storage room will be needed.
5. **ANIMAL FOOD PREPARATION:** This area will require a sink with hot and cold running water and a refrigerator. You should ensure that there is an area to disinfect feeding bowls, and that you have sufficient counter space on which to place the bowls. The food storage should be adjacent, and all food should be stored off the floor in vermin-proof containers.
6. **HYGIENE AREA:** Staff will require a wash area and toilets, together with a shower area if possible.

### ANIMAL SPACE

1. **FLOORS:** To guard against infection, all floors should have a smooth impervious surface e.g. tiles. Concrete can be used if it is hardened and treated to be impervious. In outside areas, gravel flooring is preferable to grass or earth, but must be thoroughly washed frequently. Wood is not advised as it deteriorates and paving is also difficult to keep clean.
2. **WALLS:** These should be sealed e.g. with chlorinated rubber paint, so that they can be properly cleaned. There should be no gaps or cracks that can harbour disease.
3. **DRAINAGE:** Floors should slope towards a drain that is outside the animal living areas. A drain opening of not less than 20cm diameter is recommended and it should be covered by a strainer grid. The provision of mains sewers, a cesspit or septic tank is essential.

### DOGS

The following are minimum standards based on RSPCA experience.

1. **INDIVIDUAL OR QUARANTINE KENNELS:** Each dog should have a minimum of 2m<sup>2</sup> covered and draft-free accommodation. It should have a raised bed surface. The minimum temperature is 10°C and the maximum is 26°C. Sleeping quarters must be ventilated and have both natural and supplementary light.

Each dog requires a minimum of 2.5–3.5m<sup>2</sup> of open exercise run. Fencing should be at least 2m high and be made of weld mesh. It should slope inwards at the top to stop dogs climbing. Animals must always have a view outside the kennel.

2. **GROUP HOUSING:** This is not suitable for ill, injured or nursing animals, or in shelters with a high turnover. Minimum space requirements for dogs in group housing are the same as in individual kennels per dog. Dogs should only be put into group housing after spending 10 days in quarantine. Care must be taken to match compatible animals. In group housing you must have a policy of sterilisation or strict separation of the sexes.

Attractive kennel buildings can improve rehoming rates – example shown is from a shelter in Poland



## CATS

The following are minimum standards based on RSPCA experience.

1. **Quarantine or individual cages:** Cubicles plus exercise area should be a minimum of 2.2m<sup>3</sup> with an open mesh front. Each cubicle should have a bed, a dirt/litter tray and space for food and water bowls. Good ventilation is essential and where cubicles face each other, they should be separated by at least 2m to prevent the spread of disease.
2. **Group housing:** Good ventilation is even more important in group housing. Cats need access to covered, draft-free accommodation with a bed space. Bedding is not required, nor is it recommended because of the spread of infection. The minimum temperature is 10°C and the maximum should not exceed 26°C. The outdoor space must be totally enclosed in weld mesh, but can have a solid roof. A sufficient number of dirt/litter trays to allow one per cat are required. The absolute maximum size of a group is 50, but much smaller groups are recommended. In group housing you must have a policy of sterilisation or strict separation of the sexes.

## LARGE ANIMALS

You may occasionally be called upon to take large animals such as horses. However, unless you have staff who are trained to deal with large animals, horses should only be accepted in an emergency, and kept for as short a time as possible before being taken to an alternative site where more specialised care is available. You will therefore need to identify specialists nearby that would be able to help you by 'fostering' large animals.

When making arrangements make sure you:

- check the standard of care provided will be adequate
- agree the price you will be charged
- discuss whether you will be responsible for transporting the animal to the specialist, or if they can collect
- draw up a legal contract covering all the points discussed.

## MISCELLANEOUS SMALL ANIMALS

Most shelters find that they receive a variety of small animals other than cats and dogs. A multi-purpose block can be built, but bear in mind that since it is not a specialist unit, the length of time animals stay should be as short as possible. You should try and avoid having to provide this additional accommodation by identifying people who are prepared to 'foster' these animals until new homes can be found for them. The same conditions for fostering should apply as for large animals.

The small animals block will need to be equipped with appropriate food and equipment, e.g. cages.

Horse in an RSPCA animal centre



ANDREW FORSYTH/RSPCA PHOTOLIBRARY

## SECTION 4: ESTABLISHING SHELTER ROUTINES

The establishment of effective routines is an important part of running a shelter. Well-designed routines help an organisation to run smoothly and consistently achieve set standards. Routines also help to ensure that all staff are aware of their responsibilities. Routines should be established for admitting animals, rehoming procedures and daily tasks.

### INCOMING ANIMALS

Dogs and cats must be quarantined on arrival for a minimum of 10 days. This timeframe can be adjusted according to incubation periods of common infectious diseases seen in your shelter or area. It is important that you have a dedicated quarantine area at your shelter. No contact between animals in quarantine or between quarantined animals and those ready for adoption should be allowed. All animals should be examined by a vet or an experienced member of staff within 24 hours of their arrival at the shelter, or sooner if there is any sign of injury or disease. Animals should also be vaccinated and wormed on arrival.

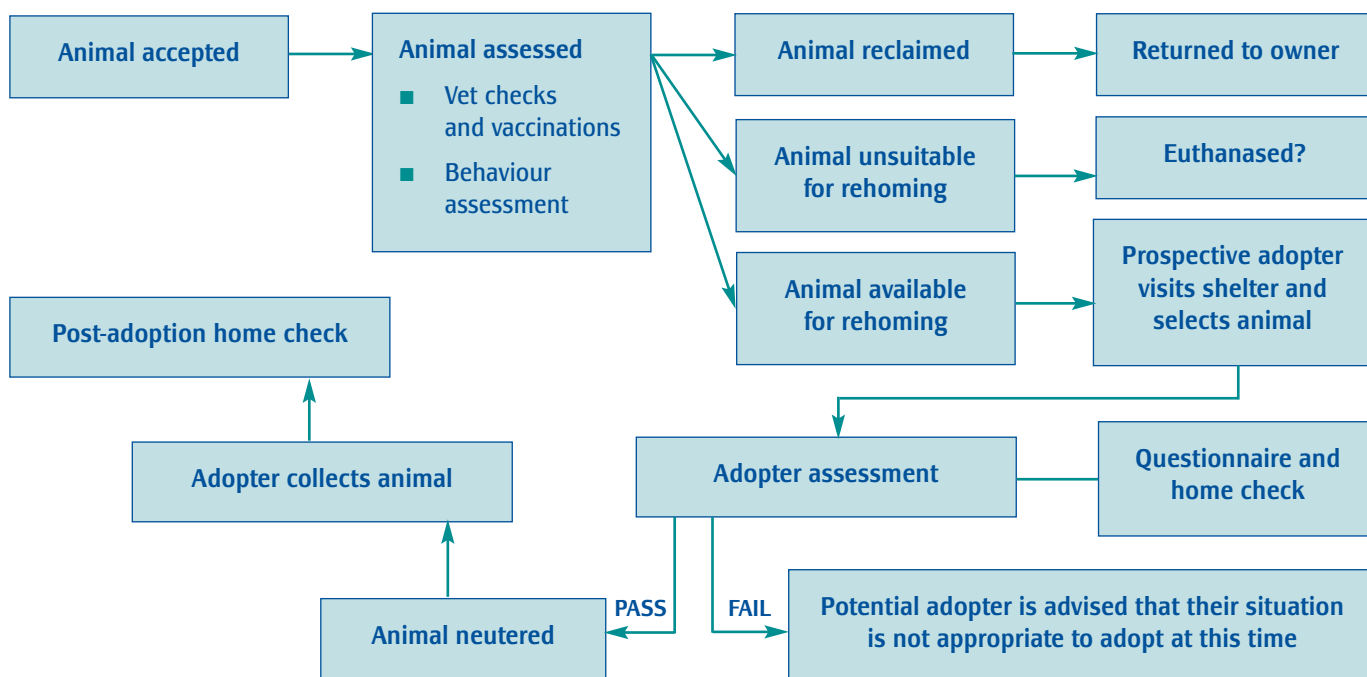
The time in quarantine gives an opportunity to assess the animal for any clinical or behavioural problems. This will help in rehoming and/or mixing appropriate animals together, particularly in communal kennels or catteries. Information gathered at arrival and during quarantine should be recorded in paper or electronic form (see *Record keeping below*).

Upon arrival all animals should be:

1. quarantined
2. examined by a vet
3. wormed
4. vaccinated.

Dogs should be kept in quarantine for seven to 10 days and cats for 14 days.

### Example of RSPCA's rehoming process



### REHOMING

The purpose of an animal shelter's rehoming programme should be to find responsible, life-long homes for animals.

Your organisation will need to establish a routine for rehoming. For instance, will you ask prospective adopters to fill in a questionnaire? Will you interview them?

To ensure an appropriate match between animal and adopter, it is important to know the needs of both the animal to be placed and their prospective adopter. Spending time refining your rehoming policy and routines will help to ensure the placement is long-term and does not increase your workload because the animals are subsequently returned, or cause undue stress to the animal.

It is important to carry out a formal assessment of animals before adoption so that:

- animals and adopters are suitably matched
- animals of unsound or questionable temperament are not rehomed.

Only healthy animals that are known not to have exhibited abnormal aggression or other serious behavioural disorders should be made available for adoption.

## Rehoming key points

1. The purpose of an animal shelter's rehoming programme is to find responsible, life-long homes for animals.
2. It is important to establish a routine for rehoming, so that staff and volunteers know the procedures to follow.
3. The written outline of the routine should state what forms are used, the sequence of the process and what fees, if any, are charged.
4. Responsible rehoming policies and procedures will help your organisation make the best decisions for the animals being adopted.
5. Use a pre-adoption questionnaire to learn as much as possible about the potential adopter's lifestyle, knowledge and commitment.

## DAILY ROUTINES

It is important that routines are established and adhered to for feeding, cleaning and record keeping. This will ensure that fewer mistakes are made and that all essential tasks are completed properly. As part of the daily work routine, each shelter should detail the times by which these duties/tasks must be completed and the names of the staff responsible. A basic daily routine would be as follows.

1. Check all cages and inspect animals.
2. Adjust ventilation and heating.
3. Clean and disinfect kennels, cattery and service buildings.
4. Clean and disinfect feeding utensils.
5. Prepare food and feed animals.
6. Each animal should be exercised and groomed every day.
7. Attend to members of the public.
8. Allow time for staff breaks.
9. Bed down animals, adjust heating and ventilation.
10. Secure all buildings.

Ideally as many cleaning tasks as possible should be completed before the shelter is opened to members of the public.

You may need to draw up different routines for the weekends, holidays, etc., but all of the tasks will still need to be fulfilled, and preferably with the minimum of disruption to the normal routines for the animals.

## FEEDING

The feeding regime should be set out clearly. Feeding times should be regular and adhered to, and concise written instructions should be available for staff. Frequent changes are unsettling for animals and should be avoided.

It is a good idea to have a wipeable white board in the food preparation area, showing the dietary requirements of each animal. The feeding products should not be changed too frequently since this can cause digestive upsets in some animals.

Food supplies must be regular and cost should take second place to quality, availability and sustainability.

The principles below should be considered when feeding:

- ensure you provide a balanced diet
- fresh clean water should be available at all times
- do not organise exercise sessions for the animals immediately after eating
- avoid sudden changes in diet
- do not overfeed.

The food preparation area must be kept clean and orderly. Utensils should be practical and readily at hand. It is advisable to buy good quality products, as these will prove cheaper in the long run. Try to keep the food preparation time to a minimum since the time would be better spent socialising with the animals.

Tinned food provides a complete balanced meal, but animals produce looser stools, which may result in longer kennel cleaning times.

Dry food (either moistened or dry) provides a complete high protein, balanced meal. Stools will be very firm – the RSPCA uses dry food where possible.

Other foods. Avoid using leftovers, if possible. The potential for disease with this food is high and the nutritional value is often low, as well as being unreliable.

## HYGIENE AND CLEANING

Systematic cleaning routines are essential to control the spread of disease. By establishing a set routine for cleaning, tasks are less likely to be forgotten and the control of disease will therefore be more effective. Cleaning routines for tasks which are to be done on a daily, weekly and monthly basis should be established and reviewed periodically to check that they are effective.

Daily cleaning:

- all occupied kennels must be cleaned daily
- animals must be moved out of the way while the cage/kennel is being cleaned, as should any moveable objects such as feeding/water bowls, dirt trays etc
- floors and walls should be thoroughly cleaned.

## CLEANING OF FEEDING UTENSILS

Feeding bowls and dirt trays can harbour disease and so they must be thoroughly cleaned. Stainless steel is the best material because it is strong and easy to keep clean.

## VERMIN CONTROL

It is important to control insects and vermin, and care should be taken to eliminate vermin host sites as far as possible. Food should not be left uncovered and spilt food should be cleaned up.

## DISEASE CONTROL

All reasonable precautions must be taken to prevent and control the spread of infectious or contagious disease among your animals. Any outbreak of infectious disease, such as kennel cough or cat flu, should be immediately treated, the animal isolated and then the outbreak should be investigated to prevent further spread and determine what precautions can be taken to reduce future outbreaks.

Early detection, immediate isolation and thorough cleaning are the key elements in disease control.

## RECORD KEEPING

Accurate records and data are essential for monitoring the health of the animals and assessing the effectiveness of the shelter. Records are also important in demonstrating the efficient and professional management of the shelter and so can help in gaining funding and municipal contracts, as well as helping to avoid legal problems.

THE INFORMATION YOU GATHER MAY ALSO SUGGEST AREAS IN WHICH YOUR POLICY SHOULD BE CHANGED.

**KEEPING IT SIMPLE:** Design your forms to include only the information that you need to know. Include the organisation's name and logo on all shelter forms.

**USE EXISTING FORMS AS EXAMPLES:** Collect forms from other organisations and select what works for you.

**REVIEW:** Forms should be reviewed annually and updated to match your changing needs.

**INFORM THE STAFF:** Accurate records and data are essential; make sure your staff understand why the records are necessary.

**LIMIT ACCESS:** Records should be kept where anyone who needs access to them can find them easily, but should also be filed out of the way.

**STORAGE AND CONFIDENTIALITY:** Keep records securely and for the length of time required by law. Some records will be available to the public, such as information on each animal, but you need to ensure other records, for example about previous owners, remain confidential.

Essential forms include the following.

1. Animal acceptance form, completed on an animal's arrival.
2. Animal assessment record, completed during the animals stay.
3. Adoption forms, including the pre-home check and adoption agreement.

Refer to the appendix for examples of these forms.

Cattery at an animal shelter in Madrid





## SECTION 5: STAFFING

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### STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS

It is essential that an appropriate staff structure is in place, and that the duties of staff are clearly understood. It is important to consider the aims of the shelter, the daily and occasional tasks, the skills of your staff and the equipment available, and develop roles and responsibilities for them as appropriate.

It is most likely that you will need to run your shelter with a combination of paid staff and volunteers. It is important that you approach the recruitment and training of volunteers with the same professionalism as you do paid members of staff. Inappropriate or poorly trained staff and volunteers can have a damaging effect on your shelter. For example, tasks such as feeding or cleaning may not be carried out properly, and visiting members of the public may be dealt with in an unfriendly or unhelpful manner.

### THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS

There are four steps in the recruitment process.

- 1. Define the need.** If you are replacing a staff member or volunteer who is leaving, try to find out why they are leaving. If it is a new position, firstly identify exactly what position it is that you are creating.
- 2. List the responsibilities.** Make sure you have a list of tasks (i.e. a job description) that the person will be expected to undertake.
- 3. Identify skills/personality.** Once you have listed the tasks that this person will perform, you can begin to identify the skills or type of personality that he/she needs to possess.
- 4. Meet the candidates and make your selection.** Ask questions that will give them the opportunity to talk about themselves and their motivations, as well as questions that will reveal facts, or which relate directly to the vacancy you are trying to fill.

By taking the time to match the skills of your employees and volunteers to the necessary roles, you make it more likely that they will stay longer with your organisation.

### HEALTH AND SAFETY

A risk assessment is a careful examination of the potential impact of your work. It reviews all activities and identifies hazards to people and animals and determines whether you have taken adequate precautions to prevent any hazards. The risk assessment should include all persons working or living at the shelter or living in the vicinity.

**HAZARD:** Anything that can cause harm, including the noise of animals.

**RISK:** Is there a chance (great or small) that someone may be harmed by the hazard?

You need to decide whether a hazard is significant and whether you have ensured satisfactory precautions so that the risk is small.

Designing and running a shelter is a complex operation requiring a great deal of planning and negotiation. Time spent at the planning stage will ensure that the shelter is well constructed and is appropriate for your needs.

The information included in this handbook is general and will need to be adapted to suit local conditions.

**Specific questions can be referred to:**

**External Affairs Department  
RSPCA  
Wilberforce Way, Southwater  
Horsham, West Sussex  
RH13 9RS  
United Kingdom**

**E-mail: [international@rspca.org.uk](mailto:international@rspca.org.uk)**

# CHECKLIST FOR PLANNING AN ANIMAL SHELTER

## SITE SELECTION

1. Proximity to housing: Is the site a minimum of 400m from the nearest residential housing?  
(You will need to check your local planning requirements.)
2. Can the site be easily reached by public transport?
3. Can mains water/drainage/electricity be connected?  
Can your organisation afford the cost of this?
4. Does the site allow for possible future expansion?
5. Have you checked all your local building and planning regulations?
6. Have you checked with the local population?

## BUILDING MATERIALS

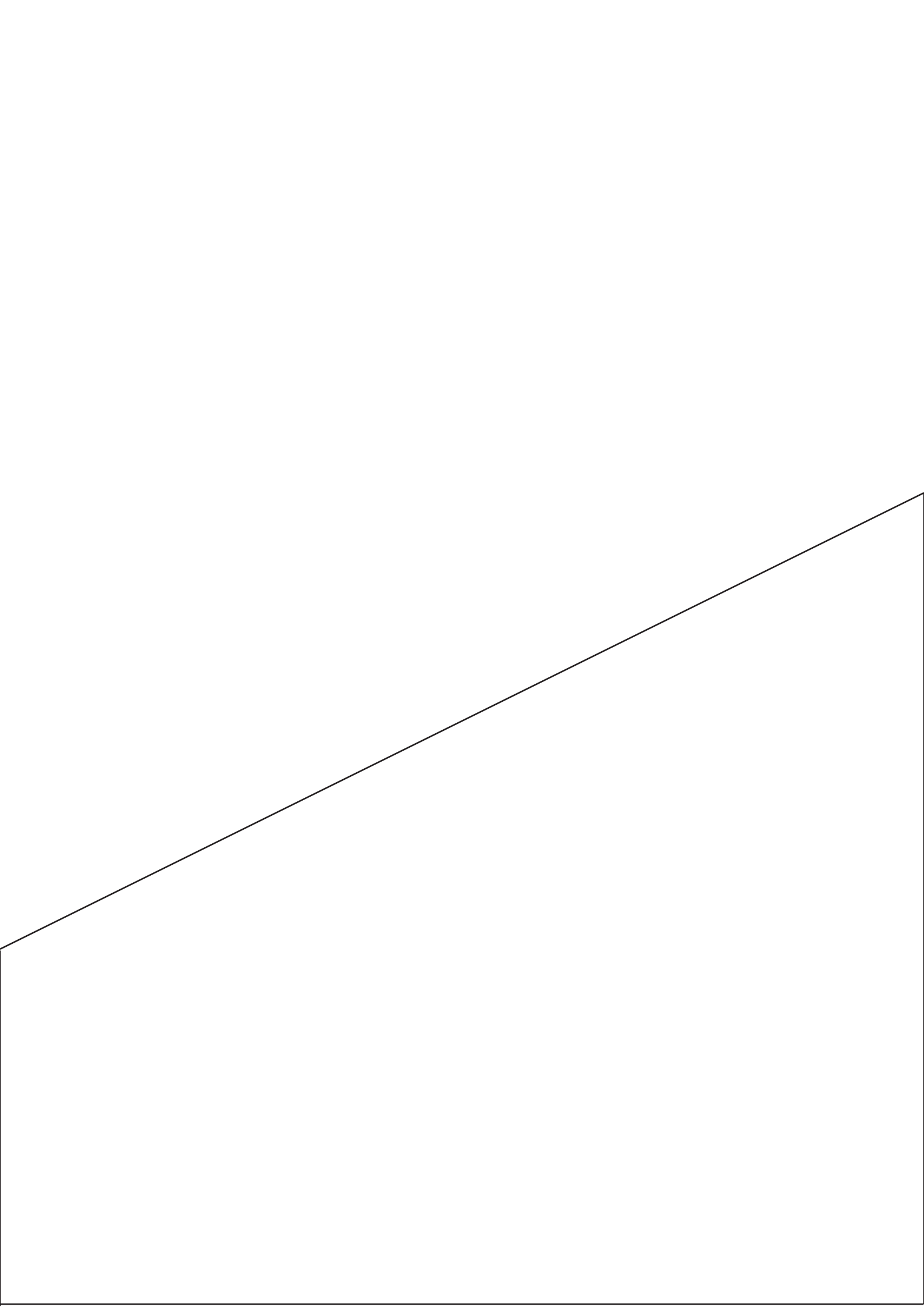
1. All internal surfaces (including floors and partitions) should be smooth, durable and impervious – are suitable building materials available?
2. Kennel and exercise area floors should not allow pooling of liquids (ideally floors should slope a minimum of 1 in 60 to a shallow drainage channel) – have provisions been made for this?
3. Will ventilation be provided in all interior areas without draughts?
4. Light must be provided (natural where possible) in exercise and sleeping areas.

## FACILITIES

1. Have you made provisions for isolation facilities at your shelter?  
(At least one isolation kennel per 10–15 kennels and these should be separate and physically isolated from other kennel areas.)
2. You will need to have separate facilities for the preparation and storage of food (with refrigeration facilities if fresh or cooked meats are to be stored).



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Registered charity no. 219099 The RSPCA relies on private donations. 10.06 COVER PHOTO: ANDREW FORSYTH/RSPCA PHOTOLIBRARY