**Northern Ireland Assembly elections 5 May 2022
Template letter to prospective Assembly candidates: manifesto pledges**
Details of prospective Assembly candidates in your constituency can be found at: <https://whocanivotefor.co.uk/>

Dear *[insert name]*

**Pledges to enhance animal health and welfare, support the veterinary profession, and protect public health in Northern Ireland**

I am writing to you as a veterinary surgeon in *[name of constituency]* and a member of the British Veterinary Association (BVA), which is the leading representative body for the veterinary profession in the UK.

The veterinary profession in Northern Ireland works to improve the health and welfare of animals, to monitor and control the spread of diseases, to assure the safety of the food we eat, and to facilitate trade. The profession is relatively small, but our reach is significant, and our role is critical to the health and welfare of not only animals, but the rest of society too. We feel the profession is in a unique position to offer informed advice on animal health and welfare and public health.

Ahead of the Assembly elections, the British Veterinary Association Northern Ireland Branch is calling on all parties to sign up to key pledges [link to manifesto] to enhance animal health and welfare, support the veterinary profession, and protect public health in Northern Ireland.

The new manifesto covers calls for action on areas such as boosting the veterinary workforce, directing agricultural funding towards improving animal health and welfare, utilising vets to help shape the new agricultural policy for NI, committing to partnership between vets and farmers to help control disease, engaging with the profession in the plans for a new veterinary school, simplifying pet travel into NI post Brexit, increased legislation around illegal puppy breeding and trading, and regulating farriers.

*[Insert a brief description of the work you do]*

I would ask you as a prospective Assembly candidate to consider and support the following pledges that resonate strongly at a personal and/or local level:

*[Please choose the pledges from the list below that are most important to you]*

**Boost the veterinary workforce**

Support a new vet school for Northern Ireland

There should be engagement with the veterinary profession on plans for a new vet school in Northern Ireland. A new vet school presents opportunities to encourage young people from the local community to pursue a veterinary career as well as building on NI strengths in veterinary research into animal health and welfare and public health. Additional funding for each veterinary school place should be agreed to maintain the quality of veterinary education.

Ensure sufficient government veterinary services

Government veterinary services have been stretched by additional demands from EU exit and pressures from the recent Avian Influenza epidemic. We’re calling for an action plan for a resilient government veterinary workforce with the capacity to safeguard animal health, animal welfare and biosecurity in Northern Ireland.

**Northern Ireland Protocol
Collaborate to preserve veterinary medicines access**
Since leaving the EU, vets in Northern Ireland have been concerned about the availability of veterinary medicines. We’re asking the Northern Ireland Executive to work with the UK Government and EU Commission to resolve this issue and ensure continued access to these medicines which are vital for safeguarding animal health and welfare.

Cooperate to simplify post-Brexit pet travel

Post-Brexit, pet owners moving from Great Britain to Northern Ireland are required to follow new pet travel rules. However, routine checks have been delayed including requirements for certification, rabies vaccination and tapeworm treatment. The Northern Ireland Executive should work with the UK Government and EU Commission to ensure processes are as simple as possible and communicate these to the vets who will need to advise confused pet owners.

**Better health and welfare for more sustainable and productive farming**

**Direct agriculture funding towards improving animal health and welfare**

Public money to replace the Common Agricultural Policy should be used to incentivise and support good animal health and welfare outcomes, based on veterinary expertise. Improving animal health will support environmental goals as healthy livestock are more productive, need fewer resources and produce less greenhouse gas emissions. Vets must be involved in shaping the new agricultural policy for Northern Ireland, to ensure that animal health and welfare, sustainability, and responsible antimicrobial use are front and centre.

**Commit to partnership working to control disease**Poor animal health leads to welfare problems, results in economic costs for agriculture, and can contribute to climate change as low productivity is not sustainable. Dealing effectively with endemic livestock diseases represents an opportunity to reduce emissions from the livestock sector. The success of Animal Health and Welfare Northern Ireland shows that endemic diseases such as Bovine Viral Diarrhoea (BVD) and Johne’s Disease can only be eradicated through partnership working between farmers, vets and government.

 **Apply behavioural science to tackle bovine TB**

Behavioural science must be core to the approach to tackling bovine TB. We’re calling for enhanced data sharing between government vets and private vets. There should be a system of earned recognition where farmers are rewarded for good biosecurity practices, including safe sourcing.

**Protect the welfare of animals at slaughter**

Slaughter without pre-stunning compromises the welfare of millions of animals. While there’s currently no non-stun slaughter in Northern Ireland, we’re calling for clear labelling of meat and meat products from animals that have not been stunned before slaughter, to improve consumer choice. We’re also calling for mandatory CCTV in all abattoirs.

**Legislate for animal welfare**

**Crack down on illegal puppy breeding and commercial movements**

During the pandemic we saw a steep rise in demand for pets, driving up illegal breeding activity and commercial movements. DAERA must remain vigilant to illegal breeding and clamp down on unregulated fertility clinics with no veterinary oversight, which are offering procedures that should only be performed by qualified vets. We’re also calling for strengthened legislation and enforcement to clamp down on the smuggling of puppies into Great Britain via Northern Ireland.

Ban the import of dogs with cropped ears

A recent spike in cases of illegal ear cropping points to the need for urgent action to curb this worrying trend. It’s an unnecessary, painful mutilation with no welfare benefit. While illegal to crop in the UK, it’s not illegal to sell ear-cropped dogs, import them, or take dogs abroad to be cropped. We want to close these loopholes and put a stop to ear-cropped dogs for good.

Regulate farriers

Farriers are important members of vet-led teams. However, there is no legal or regulatory requirement for farriers to be registered in Northern Ireland, unlike the rest of the UK and Ireland. Appropriate regulation is important to maintain professional standards and uphold animal health and welfare so we’re calling for appropriate regulation of allied professionals, including farriers.

Please do not hesitate to contact me or the BVA Public Affairs team at publicaffairs@bva.co.uk if you would like further information on any of the BVA NI Branch manifesto asks.

I hope I can count on your support.

Kind regards

*Include your name and contact details and/or your practice address if you are in practice within the constituency.*