CODE OF PRACTICE

Cat breeding

the cat group

CFSG
Canine & Feline Sector Group

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The aim of this Code of Practice is to provide you with expert guidance to ensure the welfare of your breeding cats and kittens.

This will help you provide them with a good quality of life in both the short and long term, trying to avoid any problems which may arise. It covers both pedigree and non-pedigree cats.

If you are considering whether breeding is right for you/your cat, please refer to the section '**Before you start**' below to help you decide if this is the right step for you.

This Code of Practice isn't a complete reference to cat breeding. If you haven't bred from a cat before, it is best to consult an experienced breeder and veterinary professional as well as doing your own research. Some useful sources of information are listed at the end to help with this.

What is meant by a 'breeder'?

The term 'breeder' in this document covers anyone involved in breeding cats, whether these are planned or accidental litters. The principles of caring for cats and kittens are the same, even if owners are not aware they are going to become breeders until the kittens arrive.

Your duty of care as a breeder

You have a legal 'duty of care' to your cat/s and any kittens, which is set out in the Animal Welfare Act (2006). It's a legal requirement for owners to provide for the five welfare needs of their cat/s, which are:

- A suitable environment
- A suitable diet
- To be able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns
- To be housed with, or apart from, other animals
- To be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease

In addition, this Code explains **six important factors** that you need to consider when breeding cats:

1. Ensuring that the choice of parents avoids conformational extremes, inherited disease and/or inherited behaviour traits that impact negatively on cat welfare
2. Protecting the physical health and mental wellbeing of the breeding cat(s)
3. Protecting the physical health and mental wellbeing of the kittens
4. Ensuring that the early experiences of kittens prepare them to be suitable as pets
5. Complying with legislation and best practice regarding identification (e.g. compulsory microchipping) and neutering
6. Finding suitable homes with people who will be responsible owners.

Before you start

Although you may have already decided to breed from your cat, check that you're fully prepared by asking these questions:

Do you have the time, space and energy to devote to keeping any cats and kittens clean and comfortable?

Do you have sufficient knowledge and understanding of cats and cat breeding and the skills to rear kittens to become healthy pets who will be comfortable to live with people (and possibly other animals) in homes?

Do you know about any inherited defects and conformation problems in the breed you intend to breed from?

Do you know that it is a myth that female cats need to have a litter before being neutered as it is beneficial for the cat - pregnancy and birth both pose a health risk to the mother cat, so are you prepared for this?

Are you prepared for situations such as becoming attached to the kittens or managing problems such as stillborn kittens, illness, kittens who need hand-rearing or the mother (queen) having to have an emergency caesarean section?

Are you aware of the financial implications and have funds available to care for the cats and kittens, including veterinary costs for preventive healthcare or if anything goes wrong? For example, veterinary costs for an out-of-hours emergency such as a caesarean operation can run into thousands of pounds. Breeding kittens is highly unlikely to be a profitable activity!

Do you have the time and commitment to provide ongoing support to the new owners of the kittens and the possibility they may wish to relinquish the kitten/cat at some point in its life? Responsible breeders need to be able to offer help and support with issues that may arise through the lifetime of any kittens they breed, including if the owners are unable to keep them any longer.

Will you be able to find homes for the kittens where they will be well cared for? What will you do if you can't?

Have you checked with your local council to see if you require a licence to sell animals as pets?

If you are unsure of any of the above, then it is best not to breed from your cat, at least until you are confident that you can answer 'yes' to each one. If your cat is already pregnant but you do not wish her to have kittens or feel you cannot look after her or the kittens adequately, speak to your vet as soon as possible about the possibility of terminating the pregnancy by having her spayed (neutered).

1. Ensuring that the choice of parents avoids conformational extremes or inherited problems

Cats chosen for mating should not suffer from extremes of conformation (body shape and structure), for example very short muzzles making breathing and/or eating difficult and/or causing eye problems.

You should also ensure suitable tests have been undertaken to investigate whether cats are carriers of inherited diseases. All efforts should be taken to prevent expression of inherited disease because these will impact on the future health and wellbeing of the kittens and cats. The Governing Council of the Cat Fancy (GCCF) website has more information. Often, with unplanned litters, the father is unknown so it is only possible to ensure that the mother is healthy. The risk of inherited diseases in non-pedigree cats **is** less because the gene pool is likely to be large, avoiding many of the potential consequences of inbreeding.

Producing pedigree cats means breeding from other cats of the same breed or a permitted cross between breeds. This is called selective breeding and means that the choice of breeding cats might be restricted, and cats could be related. Therefore, selective breeding increases the risk of undesirable (and in some cases harmful) genetic anomalies occurring. This means that inherited diseases are more likely to occur in pedigree cats than non-pedigree cats except in unowned cat colonies where matings between closely related cats can also result in hereditary disease and deformities.

Kittens who are produced by selective breeding should have a life span similar to non-pedigree cats, be able to breathe easily, move without pain or discomfort, exhibit natural behaviours and reproduce normally.

When selecting any cat to breed, physical health and mental wellbeing should always be prioritised over appearance. To this end:

a. **Cats chosen for breeding should be health-checked by a vet** and tested for feline leukaemia virus (FeLV) and feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV) before mating.

b. **The breeder must be aware of any inherited diseases** associated with the breed and whether there are DNA or other tests for these diseases. Where tests are available, they should be used to test cats at risk of inheriting an undesirable gene; results of tests must be considered in the decision to breed.

c. **Breeding cats must be microchipped,** and the results of tests (e.g. genetic tests for certain diseases) stored alongside the cat's unique microchip number.

d. **The breeder must consider the conformation** of the parent cats and the result of this on the future health of the cats produced. Cats should be free from any exaggerated features which cause health problems, pain and suffering, or prevent the cat from being able to behave normally. Cats with conformation that negatively affects their welfare should not be used to breed from.

e. **The breeder must consider the temperament** (e.g. sociability and confidence with social and physical environments) of the parent cats in order to influence the future ability of kittens to live confidently with people. Any cats bred from should be friendly with people and be comfortable being handled and living in a domestic home.

f. **Inbreeding** (breeding from closely related cats such as brother and sister, mother and son, or father and daughter, or grandparent and grandchild) should be avoided as it increases the risk of these inherited defects being present. Increasing the diversity of the genetic pool of animals used for breeding by avoiding inbreeding reduces the risk of health problems. An 'in-breeding co-efficient' is a calculated score which shows how closely related the offspring of a potential mating are. Breeders should check the inbreeding co-efficients for kittens from a planned mating.

Some cat breeds, like the Scottish Fold suffer from conformities which impact their health. Check with your vet if you are unsure about a cat's suitability for breeding.

2. Protecting the physical health and mental wellbeing of the breeding cats

2.1 Environment

a. Breeding queens should live in their owner's home so that they are familiar and comfortable with the human environment and activities, and where they can be cared for as outlined in the Animal Welfare Act (2006). Be aware that the risk of social stress between cats and the risk of infectious disease increases with every cat added to the home, and that some females may urine mark when in oestrus (ready to mate) and may need to be kept in a suitable, separate, easy-to-clean area for this time. This behaviour usually stops once they are pregnant, and kittens should always be delivered and cared for in a home environment.

b. Cattery-style pens should not be used as any cat's long-term environment. Keeping cats confined to pens for prolonged periods is detrimental to their welfare and does not allow the cat to perform all their normal behaviours. It is preferable for the mother to live and raise her kittens in a domestic home. If pens are used at all, extra effort must be made to ensure their welfare needs are met i.e. human contact and play may need to occur outside the pen. If cats are going to be housed in cattery-style accommodation, the standards required for the licensing of commercial boarding catteries are too small for this purpose, but can be used as a minimum for meeting welfare needs for short term use. This covers design and dimensions, environmental conditions, fulfilling the cats' needs and biosecurity.

c. Running a breeding cattery with multiple cats brings additional challenges, especially in terms of increased risk of infectious disease and stress:

- The number of cats who can be safely housed together depends upon the temperament of the cats, the size of the establishment and the management practices. Keeping cats in separate stable groups within the population is helpful to minimise stress, reduce the spread of infectious diseases and aid in the general management of the cattery. If there is conflict or other signs of stress between cats e.g. aggression or blocking of resources, or more passive signs of stress such as over-grooming, shutting down or having persistent diarrhoea, then cats should be separated.
- The number of litters in the home at any one time should be kept as low as possible because young kittens are most susceptible to disease and are also a source of infection for other cats and the environment. Kittens need to be kept separate from all other adult cats (except their mother) until they are rehomed or until fully vaccinated if being kept by the breeder. This a very important measure to adhere to as part of a programme of feline infectious peritonitis (FIP) prevention.
- Cats nearing parturition should be separated and put into a kittening room by themselves. When choosing and setting up maternity quarters, ensure the choice of appropriate hiding spaces for the queen are still accessible to the breeder.
- Addition of new cats should be done with caution to ensure disease risks are minimised. New cats should be fully vaccinated against the core diseases and also tested for retroviruses FeLV and FIV before arrival and ideally kept in quarantine for 3 weeks before being introduced to the household. Consideration should be given to testing for infectious agents causing gastrointestinal infections (e.g. Giardia, Tritrichomonas fetus) before arrival or during the quarantine period.
- Accommodation for stud cats (who are often kept in pens outside because they tend to spray their territory with strong smelling urine) must always allow for all their welfare needs to be met. Accommodation should be larger than a standard boarding cattery pen and provide interest to allow exercise and meet behavioural needs. This means that there should be an insulated stud-house 1.8 m x 1.8 m x 1.8 m with a large outside run attached (minimum recommended size 2.4 m x 2.4 m x 1.8 m high), of a complex cage design with shelving at different heights and areas to climb. Frequent interaction with people as well as novel and stimulating environmental enrichment is essential. There should be enough room, with provision of vertical space and hiding places so that when a female is introduced to his accommodation, they can spend time apart safely and without stress.
- Because many stud cats have a confined and limited environment, they should be selected appropriately and those not coping well with this lifestyle **should** be withdrawn early, neutered and rehomed. Male cats can become sexually active from as early as 6 or 7 months of age but should not be used for breeding until more mature (around 1 year of age). They should be retired by 4 years of age, or exceptionally 5 to 6 years of age at the latest, and then can be neutered and homed as pets.

2.2 Health

a. Health before mating:

- Both the stud and the queen need to be in good physical health, mental state and body condition, and free from obvious signs of infectious disease before mating. It is helpful to agree on a health plan with the cats' vet.
- Queen and stud should be screened regularly by blood test for FeLV and FIV. Stud cats should normally be tested annually, but this would depend on how many visiting queens they serve and so the level of risk. Most stud owners require the queen to be tested prior to a visit and this is good practice.
- Both queen and stud should be treated regularly for internal and external parasites according to veterinary advice.
- Common feline infectious diseases that breeders should be aware of are listed below. Those diseases which vaccination is advised for both studs and queens are marked by a * and should include regular boosters:
  - Cat 'flu (a group of respiratory diseases including feline herpesvirus (FHV) and feline calicivirus (FCV))*
  - Feline parvovirus (also known as feline infectious enteritis or feline panleukopenia)*
  - Feline leukaemia virus (FeLV)*
  - Bordetella bronchiseptica
  - Chlamydia felis
  - Feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV)
  - Feline coronavirus and feline infectious peritonitis (FIP)
  - Ringworm or dermatophytosis
  - Infectious causes of diarrhoea
  - Internal and external parasites

Additional vaccines, such as against Chlamydia infection, should be given in accordance with veterinary advice. Breeding cats should be vaccinated from kittenhood, if a maiden queen's booster vaccination is due to fall during pregnancy or lactation then this should be given early (at least 3 weeks prior to mating) for maximum effect. Some vaccines can harm the foetus if given during pregnancy, so veterinary advice should be taken. The queen should have had a recent booster vaccination so her colostrum (the milk produced in the first few hours after giving birth) will contain plenty of antibodies to pass onto the kittens.

b. Health and safety during mating:

- The queen should not be used for breeding until she is fully grown and thus should not have kittens under a year of age. Stud cats can start mating from a minimum of 10-12 months of age.
- With an arranged mating it is important that care is taken when introducing the stud and queen. Protection of the stud and visiting queens from disease, stress, injury or escape is of prime importance.
- Mating a domestic cat with a captive wild species to produce a hybrid breed (e.g. mating a female domestic cat with a male African Serval to produce a Savannah) can result in injury due the differences in size, temperament and behaviour between the species and for this reason (and more listed right) is not recommended. GCCF and most other registries do not accept early generation hybrids for registration, and they cannot be shown.
- While crossing wild cats and domestic cats is becoming more common in some parts of the world, there are many concerns and unknowns about the temperament and behaviour of these hybrids, hence why it should never be recommended. They may behave differently to the average domestic cat and be more aggressive or territorial and may also have different behavioural and nutritional requirements. Examples of hybrids include:
  - Bengals (Asian Leopard Cat hybrids)
  - Savannahs (Serval hybrids)
  - Bristols (Margay hybrids)
  - Chausies (Jungle Cat hybrids)
  - Marguerite (Sand Cat hybrid)
  - Scottish wildcat hybrids

Hybrid cats may have personality traits similar to those of their wild cat ancestors, but this will depend on how close they are to their first cross. Bengal cats, for example, may be noisy, demanding and very active, displaying aggressive behaviour towards other cats due to their territorial nature.

There are many welfare issues around hybrid cats including:

- The suitability of hybrid cats as household pets, which may depend on their degree of hybridisation.
- The welfare of, and risk of injury to, the female domestic cats used to breed with a much larger male wild cat.
- The welfare of the wild cat and early (F1) crosses who require a licence from your local authority under the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976 to be legally kept and must be kept captive and secure to prevent escape.
- Hybrid cats may need to be confined in the home for the safety of other cats and wildlife, but confinement may be detrimental to the hybrid cat's physical and mental wellbeing.

c. Physical health and mental wellbeing during pregnancy and birth:

- The queen needs to be fed appropriately according to her stage of pregnancy to ensure she remains healthy. Calorie requirements during pregnancy peak between weeks six to eight. It will therefore be necessary to increase the number of meals she is given and/or feed a higher calorie diet (e.g. food formulated for kittens). A good diet should not need supplementation - seek veterinary advice if in doubt.
- The queen's behaviour should be monitored during pregnancy to detect any problems early - during a normal pregnancy it usually alters very little. In the last two weeks of gestation, she may become quieter, more lethargic and seek solitude.
- Veterinary advice must be taken if the queen has to be given medication or treatments, including vaccines and parasite control, during pregnancy as they could affect the unborn kittens.
- Breeders should be familiar with the stages of parturition including the passing of the placentae (afterbirths) and what to do if there is a problem.
- Breeders should provide a kittening room which should be somewhere safe and quiet for the queen to give birth. The bed or kittening box should be warm and private, and located where the breeder can have access to the queen if she needs help. Provide a kittening box in a quiet, secure and fairly dark place 5-7 days before the kittens are due and encourage the cat to use it.
- Breeders should observe but not interfere unless absolutely necessary. Most queens are attentive and clean the kittens immediately. Occasionally it is necessary to remove foetal membranes from the kitten and stimulate breathing.
- Breeders should research the out-of-hours availability of local vets well in advance of the birth of the kittens in case help is required. Veterinary help should be sought if there is concern about the queen or if she seems distressed including:
  - If the queen is more than 2 days overdue (gestation range is 63-65 days).
  - If between 30 and 60 minutes of intense straining does not produce a kitten, or a kitten seems to be stuck, and/or if the queen becomes noticeably distressed.
  - If the queen is depressed, lethargic, seems to have a raised temperature, or has passed unpleasant discharge from her vulva.
  - If the queen is bleeding excessively from her vulva; or
  - If not all the kittens seem to have been born.

For more information about vaccinations please visit
icatcare.org/articles/vaccinating-your-cat

3. Protecting the physical health and mental wellbeing of the mother and the kittens in her care

Remember that the welfare of the queen is just as important as the kittens and her welfare needs must be met at all times.

3.1 Environment

a. The queen and litter should be kept in a quiet, warm, well-ventilated but draft–free kittening room maintained at a fairly constant 18 to 24°C for the first 4-5 weeks.

b. The temperature of the kittening box should be warmer initially (around 30°C) so additional heating by an infra-red lamp, covered hot water bottle or heated pad may be required. These should be used with caution as the kittens can't move away if they overheat. **Note** that a heat pad should not be used as the only heat source.

c. The kittening room should contain everything the queen needs including food, water and a litter tray.

d. The queen should not generally be disturbed as this could lead to her rejecting or harming the kittens. She will be in the kittening box for most of the time immediately after the birth except for when eating, drinking and toileting.

e. The queen should be given the opportunity to have some respite from the kittens as they grow by providing hiding places and shelving so she can get away when she wishes to.

f. The queen and kittens' environment should be kept clean, and the bedding and litter changed frequently. However, it is important not to disturb the queen too much initially and only clean the soiled areas while leaving the rest to maintain the scent and avoid disturbance.

g. The kittening room should have a dedicated set of feed bowls and low-sided litter trays which should be cleaned and disinfected regularly using unscented cat-safe products.

h. Generally, other cats should be kept away from the queen when the kittens are born. Nursing queens will usually show extreme aggression to an intruder and may even harm the kittens. Cats of some breeds may tolerate a closely related female as a birthing partner, but great care needs to be taken regarding this.

i. Dogs should be kept away until after the kittens have begun weaning, and only then under close supervision. Dog behaviour towards kittens can be extremely variable due to the diversity of dog breeds, temperaments, and experience with cats and kittens so use appropriate caution including restraint such as harnesses and long lines where required.

j. Children should only be allowed to handle kittens when they are at least 2 weeks of age and only under very close supervision and after assessment of the queen's reaction, as some may show protective behaviours until the kittens are older. Once socialisation of the kittens starts (at approximately 2 weeks of age), contact with people and other animals is important but must be managed carefully (see section 4).

k. Nursing queens should never be allowed out to free range. If the worst happened and she was killed in an accident, the kittens would need hand rearing which is complex and time consuming.

3.2 Suitable diet

a. The queen must be given adequate nutrition as lactation dramatically increases energy requirements and she may need up to three times her normal calorie intake. Providing the queen with free access to food formulated for kittens throughout this period can provide good nutrition for her. A vet should be consulted if there is any query about what and how much to feed.

b. A supply of fresh water, which is vital for milk production, must always be available.

c. The breeder must monitor the kittens to ensure they are getting sufficient food and have all the materials required for supplementary feeding ready before the kittens are born in case there is a problem with the queen feeding the kittens. For the first three weeks of life kittens normally feed solely on their mothers' milk and colostrum provides some temporary protection against infectious disease.

d. If supplementary feeding is required in the first few weeks, a milk formula and bottles designed for kittens should be used and manufacturer's instructions regarding amounts, frequency, temperature and hygiene followed.

e. The kittens' growth rates should be monitored, and they should continue to gain weight steadily. Ideally, they should be weighed quickly and quietly at birth if the queen is content for them to be handled, and then daily for the first week to check they are growing (if the queen is happy). Normal kitten weight is around 100g at birth, but this depends on the breed of cat and the size of the litter, so the range is between 60g and 170g. Weight should rise steadily each day, doubling by days 10 to 14. If any kitten is not putting on weight or there are any other worries, veterinary advice should be sought. Records should be kept for each individual kitten (use photographs to identify if required).

f. A good quality kitten food (following the manufacturer's feeding instructions) should be fed during weaning (the gradual process of introducing a solid diet to kittens and reducing the volume of milk). Weaning should begin at three to four weeks of age and is usually completed by six to eight weeks of age.

3.3 Health

a. The queen and the kittens should be seen by a vet for a routine check-up two to three weeks after birth and to find out what sex the kittens are. Your vet may consider a home visit. It is always best to separate the queen and kittens when travelling as some queens may harm young kittens if very stressed by the change of environment, so speak to your vet team in advance about how to make travel and the visit to the clinic as low-stress as possible. The kittens should be put in a separate carrier on a soft blanket over a warm pad for the journey and the queen should be able to see them from her carrier at all times.

b. The breeder should be continually observant of the health of the queen and aware of signs of ill health after giving birth. In particular, you should observe if all the afterbirths have been passed.

Veterinary advice should be sought promptly if there is any cause for concern, including retention of afterbirths.

Common signs to look for are:

- Persistent bleeding or discharge from the vulva
- Fever, weakness or lethargy
- Panting, restlessness, twitching or having a seizure
- Not eating
- Seeming unsettled or distressed
- Not paying attention to the kittens or not feeding them.

c. The breeder should be continually observant of the health of the kittens and aware of signs of ill health. Veterinary advice should be sought promptly if there is any cause for concern.

Common signs to look for are:

- Weight loss or failure to gain weight (kittens should be weighed regularly)
- Lethargy
- Crying excessively
- Failing to suckle milk
- Dehydration
- Diarrhoea or constipation
- Being ignored by litter mates and/or mother.

Common health problems seen in young kittens include:

- Infectious disease
- Hypothermia (getting too cold)
- Hypoglycaemia (low blood sugar).

d. Kittens should be vaccinated before they go to their new home and before the kitten is allowed access outdoors.

e. Breeders should follow veterinary advice on the vaccination programme, but it usually starts at eight to nine weeks of age with a second dose at 12 weeks of age. A third may be considered at 16-20 weeks of age. Most cats are vaccinated against feline parvovirus (panleukopenia), and the viruses that commonly cause cat 'flu - feline calicivirus (FCV) and feline herpesvirus (FHV). It is also possible to vaccinate against feline leukaemia virus (FeLV), and feline chlamydia, depending on circumstances.

f. Breeders should let new owners know of the vaccination history of the kittens and the vaccination certificate should be given to the new owner. If a 3rd vaccination at 16-20 weeks of age has been recommended by their vet, the breeder should inform the new owner about getting this done.

g. All kittens should be treated with an appropriate worming treatment to kill intestinal parasites (i.e. roundworms), carefully following veterinary guidance or advice from the pharmaceutical company supplying the treatment regarding dosage for young kittens. Fleas are common and can be harmful to kittens. Veterinary advice should be sought on suitable treatments.

h. Breeders should advise new owners on parasite treatment including what treatment has been undertaken and on future parasite prevention.

3.4 Breed again or neuter?

Queens come into season (oestrus) again soon after giving birth and could become pregnant again. If you do not want the queen to have any more kittens it is best to get her neutered about 8 weeks after giving birth, when the kittens are fully weaned. Careful consideration should be given as to whether the queen should be used for breeding again or neutered.

Things to consider include:

- Health of the queen
- Ease of giving birth and caring for the kittens
- Health of the kittens
- Inherited or congenital problems with kittens
- Temperament of the queen and consideration of how she has handled the experience
- Your ability to cope with the experience of breeding
- Ability to cover all the costs again
- Age of the queen - queens should not be bred from after the age of 6 or earlier if she has had any problems relating to breeding or giving birth
- If the queen is going to be used for breeding again, the timing of the next mating should be carefully considered. The queen should not be mated again at her next season. It is not recommended for the queen to have more than 3 litters in 2 years (with at least 6 months between births) or more than 6 litters in her lifetime. Some breeds have a higher frequency of oestrous cycle, e.g. Oriental, Siamese and some other breeds such as Burmese tend to go into season more frequently and sometimes more persistently than breeds such as Persian, Exotic or British Shorthair. Speak to your vet about neutering or using medications to control the cycle.

4. Ensuring that the early experiences of kittens shape them to be suitable pets

To make suitable pets, kittens must be comfortable living closely with people in a home environment.

To ensure this, they need to have positive and suitable handling and life experiences within the first two months of life. Careful, gentle introductions to people and household life, will ensure they aren't fearful of people or the things which happen in a human household. This is vital to producing future cats who are not stressed by being kept as pets. It is a small window of opportunity.

It can be all too easy to simply manage feeding and cleaning and not give suitable consideration to preparing kittens to be comfortable around people.

Caring for too many cats and kittens at once not only increases the risk of the spread of disease, but it may mean that the quality of this exposure may not be sufficient.

If kittens are carefully introduced to routine household activities, such as vacuuming, they are more likely to adapt to their new homes

Socialisation

- Socialisation is the process whereby kittens learn about people and/or other animals. At the same time, a kitten will learn about normal household sights, sounds, smells and tactile stimulations which will be part of their life as a pet cat.
- Positive experiences with different people and different things will teach a kitten that these experiences are non-threatening. However, any negative experiences, or no experiences at all, can cause a kitten to become fearful and this fear is likely to continue into adulthood. If we want cats to be happy and relaxed with people, they need to be exposed to a domestic environment in a positive way that is not frightening so that they can interact without negative emotions.
- Kittens are best able to learn to deal with people and new things during their socialisation period (which is from two weeks to seven-eight weeks of age) when levels of fear are lowest and confidence to approach new things is highest.
- Kittens who have not learned this are likely to be anxious or fearful in a home setting. If kittens are reared in environments which fail to provide adequate variation and complexity, they can be at risk of developing behavioural problems relating to anxiety, fear and even phobia.

4.1 Breeders should take their responsibility regarding socialisation very seriously.

Breeders must:

a. Be aware of the limited window of opportunity to try and help kittens to develop into behaviourally suitable pets.

b. Be aware of the best ways to interact positively with kittens to develop their confidence in a domestic environment and their interaction with people - ideally following a kitten socialisation programme which provides guidance on what it is important to expose a kitten to, at what age different exposures are appropriate, how frequently and for what duration (see '**Useful Resources**')

c. Be aware that single kittens or hand-reared kittens may not receive adequate learning because of a lack of siblings or lack of a mother, and recognise that extra effort will be needed to address this. Such kittens may be more susceptible to feeling frustration throughout life which can lead to problem behaviours.

5. Complying with legislation and best practice regarding identification and neutering

Breeders have legal responsibilities when selling kittens and these may vary in different parts of the UK. They may also be updated from time to time. It is advisable to check any requirements with your local authority to get the most up to date information.

5.1 Animal Welfare regulations

Currently under the Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (England) Regulations 2018 (as amended in 2019 to include ban on third party sales), the main requirements in England are:

a. Kittens must be at least 8 weeks of age before they can be sold. This is the minimum welfare standard; best practice is to home kittens at 13 weeks old and fully vaccinated.

b. It is illegal for someone to sell kittens they have not bred themselves. Breeders must sell kittens directly to new owners, or kittens may be rehomed through a rehoming centre.

c. The breeder must be licensed as a pet vendor if kittens are sold with the intent of making a profit and/or if the breeder is repeatedly selling kittens. If the breeder produces a small number of kittens, or gives them away, or charges a nominal fee, a licence may not be needed. Check your local authority rules.

d. Accurate records of income and expenses regarding the breeding and sale of the kittens should be kept.

e. Sick kittens must not be sold, nor must claims be made that the kitten is something that they are not, e.g. a specific breed or type. Adverts must be truthful.

f. Kittens sold as registered pedigree cats should have the relevant paperwork at the time of sale.

5.2 Microchipping

a. Microchipping is the best permanent form of identification for cats. Ideally kittens should be microchipped by a vet at the time of first vaccination. Some vets/operators/owners may prefer to wait until the second vaccination or neutering.

b. In England, microchipping regulations came into force in June 2024. This requires that all cats over 20 weeks of age must be microchipped, the only exception being unowned cats.

c. Owners should be advised they have a legal responsibility to add their contact details to the microchip database and to keep these up-to-date.

5.3 Neutering

a. Unless kittens are intended to be used for breeding (with all the points in this code considered), males and females should be neutered at around four months (16 weeks) old.

b. Breeders of cats should either advise new owners to neuter kittens, or breeders can have kittens neutered before they go to their new homes.

6. Finding suitable homes with people who will be responsible owners

6.1 Breeder responsibilities

Breeders have responsibilities for finding suitable homes for the kittens they have bred:

a. Anyone selling or giving away a kitten to a new home must make sure the new owners and the kittens are well-matched. Prospective owners must understand what their responsibilities will be in terms of the time, effort and expense that cat ownership entails.

b. The Kitten Checklist should be provided to prospective buyers so that information on vaccination, health and socialisation, etc. is recorded and understood.

c. Prospective new owners should be advised to see kittens with their mother and so breeders should be prepared to do this too.

d. Breeders should give the new owner information on looking after a cat in the form of a care sheet or leaflets or links to appropriate websites.

e. Topics covered should include (but not limited to):

- The five welfare needs: (the legal duty of care for owners, set out in the Animal Welfare Act (2006)). - diet, environment, behaviour, companionship and health.

This should include specific information on:

- **Health** - registering with a vet, neutering, vaccinations, parasite control.
- **Environment** - setting up the home with all the required key resources and opportunities for displaying normal behaviour and specific advice to settling the kitten in during its first few days in the home.
- **Diet** - what the kitten has been fed, frequency of meals, water.
- **Cat litter** - what the kitten is used to, where to put litter trays.
- **Identification** - suitable, quick-release collars, microchipping, and updating microchip details.
- **Insurance** - benefits, details about if the kitten is covered and for how long.
- **Transportation** - secure carrier and carrier training.
- **Integration into the household** - especially if they have children, other pets.
- **Interactions** - how best to pet, handle, groom and medicate the kitten.
- **Safety outdoors** - consider traffic level. Discuss option of catio (a cat-secure garden) or garden enclosure if outdoor environment unsuitable for free ranging for any other reason.
- **Contact details** - for advice or so they can return the kitten if necessary.

Definitions

Colostrum: The first milk produced by the queen which is rich in antibodies and gives kittens some protection from infectious disease until their own immune systems are more developed.

Conformation: The shape and structure of the body.

Crossbreed: A cat whose parents are of two different breeds (but see permitted crosses between permitted breeds).

Dystocia: Difficulty in giving birth.

Genetics: The study of how the characteristics of living things are passed through the genes from parents to offspring.

Hybrid: The offspring of two different species or sub-species.

Lactation: Milk production from the mammary glands.

Non-pedigree: A cat of no specific breed. This includes the terms 'moggie', domestic short hair and domestic long hair.

Oestrus: Being in season or calling; the time when the female is receptive to the male and mating, which can be very loud.

Parturition: The process of giving birth.

Pedigree: A cat whose ancestry is recorded in a document known as the pedigree. Strictly speaking they do not have to be purebred though they usually are.

Placenta: Afterbirth.

Purebred: A cat whose ancestors are all of the same or a permitted other breed. These are commonly known as pedigree cats though this is not the strict definition.

Queen: An intact or entire female cat, i.e. one who is not neutered.

Registered: A cat whose ancestry is documented and recorded with a cat registering association i.e. a regulatory body e.g. GCCF, TICA.

Socialisation: The process whereby kittens learn about the world around them and what is 'safe'.

Stud cat: A registered entire male cat retained for breeding.

Useful resources (Articles and statements)

AAFP and ISFM Environmental Needs:
journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1098612X13477537

Animal Welfare Act 2006:
legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/45/contents

The Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (England) Regulations 2018:
legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2018/486

Boarding Cattery Standards:
gov.uk/government/publications/animal-activities-licensing-guidance-for-local-authorities/cat-boarding-licensing-statutory-guidance-for-local-authorities

Breeding from your cat:
gccfcats.org/breeding-cats

British Small Animal Veterinary Association (BSAVA) position on vaccination:
bsava.com/position-statement/vaccination/

BSAVA position on inherited diseases and exaggerated characteristics:
bsava.com/position-statement/inherited-diseases-and-exaggerated-characteristics/

British Veterinary Association (BVA) position on extreme conformation:
bva.co.uk/media/3122/bva-policy-position-on-extreme-conformation-september-2018.pdf

Cat breeds:
gccfcats.org/getting-a-cat/choosing/cat-breeds

Code of practice for the welfare of cats:
gov.uk/government/publications/code-of-practice-for-the-welfare-of-cats

European Advisory Board on Cat Diseases (ABCD):
abcdcatsvets.org/

Kitten Checklist:
thecatgroup.org.uk/pdfs/The-Kitten-Checklist.pdf

Kitten Neutering Database:
cat-kind.org.uk

The Microchipping of Cats and Dogs (England) Regulations 2023:
legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2023/468/body/made

Pregnancy and kitten care:
cats.org.uk/help-and-advice/pregnancy-and-kitten-care

Reducing cat stress during a vet visit:
icatcare.org/advice/taking-your-cat-to-the-vet/

Selling animals as pets licence (England):
gov.uk/guidance/selling-animals-as-pets-licence-england

Socialisation chart:
cats.org.uk/media/1985/socialisation-chart.pdf

UFAW genetic welfare problems of cats:
ufaw.org.uk/cats/cats

Useful resources (Organisations)

The Cat Group
thecatgroup.org.uk

Canine and Feline Sector Group (CFSG)
cfsg.org.uk

Animal Training & Behaviour Council (ABTC)
abtc.org.uk

Battersea
battersea.org.uk

Blue Cross
bluecross.org.uk

British Small Animal Veterinary Association (BSAVA)
bsava.com

British Veterinary Nursing Association (BVNA)
bvna.org.uk

Cats Protection
cats.org.uk

Governing Council of the Cat Fancy (GCCF)
gccfcats.org

International Cat Care
icatcare.org

Mayhew
themayhew.org

PDSA
pdsa.org.uk

RSPCA
rspca.org.uk

Woodgreen Pets Charity
woodgreen.org.uk

thecatgroup.org.uk

cfsg.org.uk