

# Lockdown puppy boom leads to increase in ear cropping cruelty

## Call to close loopholes allowing the practice

When Sasha, a nine-week-old pocket bulldog, arrived at her emergency foster care placement her ears were infected, swollen and extremely painful. Sasha was seized after she had been seen by a member of the public who called the RSPCA with concerns for her welfare. After an inspector found her with her ears cropped Sasha remained in the care of the charity.

Ear cropping is a painful mutilation, involving cutting off part of the ear flap, often without anaesthesia or pain relief. It is illegal in the UK and Wales but still legal in other parts of the world such as the US and some European countries.

The RSPCA has seen a 621 per cent increase in the number of reports of ear cropping in the last six years.

### Barbaric practice

Earlier this month a petition to stop the rising number of cropped dogs in the UK reached over 100,000 signatures. Jordan Shelley, director at the FOAL group (Focus on Animal Law) – who launched the petition – said this shows the weight of public support for the campaign.

Shelley began his campaign after contacting companies advertising cropping and was told it was legal to import cropped dogs. With co-directors Nicola Skelley and Sarah Dixon he found other legal loopholes, allowing dogs cropped abroad to be sold onto someone else, and for dogs to be sent abroad to get cropped and then returned home – a surgical “holiday”. “It’s barbaric and needs to be stopped,” said Shelley.

RSPCA dog welfare expert Dr Samantha Gaines said dogs have their ears cropped



Sasha was seized from owners who are now banned from owning animals

for one reason – to make them look “tougher and more intimidating”.

Historically, breeds such as Dobermans had their ears cropped as puppies and then splinted – taped to bits of wood or cardboard – to make their ears grow upwards instead of leaving them to go floppy. Now, breeds such as American bullies end up having their whole ears removed.

Despite suspecting most dogs are sent abroad to be cropped, the RSPCA still has concerns it is also being carried out underground in this country. One of Shelley’s colleagues who has been a vet for almost 30 years had not previously seen any cropped dogs in their surgery but now they are seeing one or two a week. Shelley said there has been a significant rise in imports throughout Covid with people desperate for puppies.

Gaines would like to see more regulation to ensure it’s no longer possible to get a cropped dog in England and Wales, unless rescuing through a reputable organisation. Shelley called for tougher sentences and for imports to be made illegal.

“There has been a rise of celebrities on social media buying cropped puppies from

abroad and posting them on their feeds as ‘normal.’ This is not a normal look,” said Skelley.

According to the RSPCA, cutting a dog’s ears off can not only damage their health but their behaviour. Where a dog’s ears are positioned, also known as their ear carriage, can help people understand if they are anxious, happy or calm. If a dog’s ears have been removed, it can be much harder to know how they feel.

### Cut the crop

The FOAL directors have brought together British vets, vet nurses and animal welfare charities to join them in their #FlopNotCrop campaign in a bid to #CutTheCrop.

“We have lots more to do. This is just the start of the campaign to close the legal loopholes,” said Skelley.

Even though Sasha’s ears were cruelly cropped, her foster carer Mark Allen, manager at RSPCA Preston, described her temperament as friendly and happy. He gave Sasha antibiotics and pain relief and she was eventually rehomed. In February 2020, Sasha’s owners pleaded guilty in court and were banned from owning animals indefinitely.

KELLY MATTISON

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### ROUGH SLEEPER GUIDANCE

New government guidance on refusing rough sleepers permission to remain in the UK could undermine efforts to cut homelessness, according to Homeless Link’s chief executive. The guidance, for Home Office staff, says permission should be refused if rough sleepers have refused support or engaged in anti-social behaviour. But Rick Henderson said the rules should be scrapped entirely.

### BENEFITS UNCLAIMED

Around half a million people who were eligible for Universal Credit at the start of the Covid pandemic did not claim it, according to research led by Salford University. They were a mix of people who felt applying was too difficult, wrongly believed they were ineligible and were put off by the perceived stigma. The researchers called for the government to implement a benefits take-up strategy.

### RECOVERY LEADERS

Cities and large towns in the North and Midlands have so far witnessed the strongest job posting recoveries since the Covid pandemic began, according to think tank Centre for Cities. In nine cities and large towns — led by Barnsley, Mansfield and Stoke — there are more job postings now than before the pandemic. Hull, Middlesbrough and Doncaster also performed well.

### HULL TENANT AID

Hull City Council has launched a rent advice campaign to urge council tenants to get in touch if they are struggling to pay rent due to Covid-19. Tenants experiencing problems, including struggling to pay rent and housing issues, can go online at [hull.gov.uk/councilrent](http://hull.gov.uk/councilrent) or call 01482 300 300 to request an appointment with an adviser.

Got an event, campaign or story from your area? Call 0161 831 5563 or email [news@bigissuenorth.co.uk](mailto:news@bigissuenorth.co.uk)