



**Chris Heaton-Harris**  
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*Dear Constituent,*

Thank you for contacting me about pet theft.

To their owners, pets are cherished members of the family, so I entirely agree with you that stealing one from a loving home is a particularly vicious crime. While I understand that Ministers do not currently believe the creation of a specific offence for pet theft, with a two-year custodial penalty, would be a solution to the problem, they are keen to act in this area and will continue to have discussions with the police and animal welfare organisations.

At a recent Westminster Hall debate, Victoria Prentis MP, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, highlighted that the theft of a pet is already a criminal offence under the Theft Act 1968 and the maximum penalty is seven years imprisonment, which can be increased even further if the theft occurred as part of an aggravated burglary or robbery.

In addition, when a stolen pet is mistreated, offences under the Animal Welfare Act 2006 of animal cruelty or failure to meet an animal's basic needs carry a maximum of six months' imprisonment or an unlimited fine, or both. Also, legislation has now been introduced to Parliament which will increase maximum penalties for animal cruelty from six months to five years imprisonment.

It is for the courts to decide the right sentence in individual cases and a new sentencing guideline on theft came into force at the beginning of 2016. Further, the Independent Sentencing Council guidelines take into account the emotional distress and harm that theft can have on the victim, such as theft of a much-loved pet, and accordingly recommends higher penalties for such situations.

Thank you again for taking the time to contact me.

Yours faithfully,

**CHRIS HEATON-HARRIS MP**  
**MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR DAVENTRY**

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