

PETER GIBSON MP



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

February 2021

Dear Constituent,

Thank you for your email 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. As a dog owner myself, I was deeply concerned to read reports of an increase in pet theft across the UK. While the number of incidents in our area is thankfully low. If my nine-year-old Jack Russell, my seven-year-old Labrador, or my four-year-old Labrador were stolen, they could not be replaced, and I am glad that action is being taken locally in an effort to raise awareness for these incidents and offer useful information.

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, I am pleased that 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, I was delighted to speak on behalf of my constituents and to raise their concerns with Ministers. If you would like to see my speech for yourself you can do so here: <https://www.facebook.com/Gibbo4Darlo/videos/789762854904293/>

At the end of the debate, I was glad to hear from Victoria Prentis, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs who 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. I am pleased legislation has now been introduced to Parliament which will increase maximum penalties for animal cruelty from six months' to five years' imprisonment.

Member of Parliament for Darlington

Telephone: 020 7219 3077 Email: peter.gibson.mp@parliament.uk

Website: www.petergibson.org  www.facebook.com/gibbo4darlo

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. I appreciate you may be disappointed that it does not specifically mention pet theft. The Independent Sentencing Council guidelines do however 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.

Once again, thank you for taking the time to contact me and if I can ever be any further assistance to you then please do not hesitate to contact me again.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Peter Gibson". The signature is written in black ink and includes a small flourish at the end.

PETER GIBSON MP