CMA veterinary services for household pets market investigation

Linnaeus' comments on the draft Veterinary Services Market Investigation Order 2026 materials for public consultation

20 August 2026

In response to the CMA's public consultation on the draft Veterinary Services Market Investigation Order 2026 (the ***Order***) and related materials, Linnaeus sets out in the tables below its amendments to certain materials, together with an explanation of each amendment.

1. The Order

Art.	Draft text	Linnaeus' proposed changes	Linnaeus' comments
[✂]	[✂]	[✂]	[✂]
2	'Treatment Pathway' means all diagnostic tests and/or treatments which a Veterinary Professional, using their judgement and exercising reasonable care and skill, has recommended and/or recommends for the purpose of diagnosing, treating and/or managing what they judge the Pet's medical condition is reasonably likely to be. It includes: (a) diagnostic tests and/or treatments already provided to, or chosen by, the Pet Owner; […]	'Treatment Pathway' means all diagnostic tests and/or treatments which a Veterinary Professional, using their judgement and exercising reasonable care and skill, has recommended and/or recommends for the purpose of diagnosing, treating and/or managing what they judge the Pet's medical condition is reasonably likely to be. It includes: (a) diagnostic tests and/or treatments already provided to, or chosen by, the Pet Owner in the last three months before the Treatment Pathway is recommended; […]	Under the CMA's current drafting, limb (a) includes a backward-looking element without any time limit, requiring Vets to manually review Pet Owners' records, taking significant time and resource (with limited benefit to Pet Owners). Additionally, as the look-back period increases, it becomes significantly more difficult to determine which historic tests and/or treatments relate to the condition for which the Vet is now providing a written estimate. This raises significant implementation issues for all Vets. Linnaeus has therefore proposed drafting to limit the look-back period to three months, which it considers to be a proportionate approach. Such a limitation seeks to balance the need for a look-back period to include clinically relevant tests/treatments, whilst preventing this obligation from

Art.	Draft text	Linnaeus' proposed changes	Linnaeus' comments
			imposing burdensome requirements on Vets.
3	(1) Veterinary Businesses to which the Parts and Articles of this Order apply as set out in the Order must comply with the requirements imposed on them by those Parts and Articles from the next Working Day after the dates stipulated in the following table (the Compliance Date):	(1) Subject to Article 3(2), Veterinary Businesses to which the Parts and Articles of this Order apply as set out in the Order must comply with the requirements imposed on them by those Parts and Articles from the next Working Day after the dates stipulated in the following table (the Compliance Date).~~:~~ (2) Where, after the applicable Compliance Date, a person or entity obtains Ownership, Control or Influence over a Veterinary Business: (a) that Veterinary Business and any Veterinary Business or Main Entity required to comply with this Order in respect of it must make any changes required for compliance as a consequence of that change in Ownership, Control or Influence as soon as reasonably practicable and, in any event, within 90 days beginning with the first day after the Ownership, Control or Influence is obtained; and (b) that Veterinary Business and any Veterinary Business or Main Entity which, following that change in Ownership, Control or Interest,	The Order does not currently provide an implementation period following a change in the Ownership, Control or Influence of a Veterinary Business after the applicable Compliance Date. This creates two issues. Firstly, even where an acquired practice was previously compliant, the acquisition may itself require changes to maintain compliance (e.g. changes to external signage). Those changes may be dependent on factors which are outside the control of the acquirer, such as the requirement to obtain landlord approval, or other consents, including consents from the council which may take an extended period of time where a practice is located in a conservation area, a listed building or similar. The timing and outcome of those processes are not within Veterinary Businesses' control as these depend on third parties (e.g. landlords, councils etc). It is therefore difficult to predict precisely how long such processes may take. Linnaeus estimates that 90 days (i.e. approximately three months), is likely to be a reasonable period in which to obtain approvals and implement the changes required.

Art.	Draft text	Linnaeus' proposed changes	Linnaeus' comments
		is required to comply with this Order in relation to it shall not, during the period of 30 Working Days beginning with the first Working Day after that change, be in breach solely by reason of any ongoing non-compliance existing immediately before that change in Ownership, Control or Influence. (3) Article 3(2)(b) does not affect the liability of any person or entity for a failure to comply with this Order occurring before the change in Ownership, Control or Influence, or prevent the investigation or enforcement of any such failure.	Secondly, an acquired practice may have ongoing non-compliance that was not identified through due diligence. It would be unreasonable for a new Veterinary Business or Main Entity to be exposed to potential enforcement action for an inherited failure that it did not cause and could not remedy before obtaining control. For example, bringing a non-compliant Price List into compliance may require an assessment of the practice's services and prices, verifying third-party charges with corresponding changes to its website, practice management systems etc. Completing those steps could reasonably take around 30 Working Days. Linnaeus has therefore proposed a time-limited grace period of 30 Working Days for both the acquired practice and the new acquirer in respect of the non-compliance that existed immediately before the transaction which continues and needs to be rectified. During that period, they would be required to use that period to identify and remedy the inherited non-compliance and bring the practice into compliance with the Order. The proposed grace period would not affect liability for any breach that occurred before the change in Ownership, Control or Influence.

Art.	Draft text	Linnaeus' proposed changes	Linnaeus' comments
[✂]	[✂]	[✂]	[✂]
[✂]	[✂]	[✂]	[✂]
11(3)	Article 11(1) does not apply where a Pet Owner has provided explicit, unambiguous and unconditional confirmation that they do not wish to receive a Written Estimate.	Article 11(1) does not apply where a Pet Owner has expressly confirmed~~provided explicit, unambiguous and unconditional confirmation~~ that they do not wish to receive a Written Estimate.	The drafting has been simplified to remove unnecessary and potentially ambiguous requirements concerning the form of the Pet Owner's confirmation. "Expressly confirmed" provides a clear and workable threshold.
13(2)(a)	any instructions, incentives, influence or (actual or perceived) pressure from the Veterinary Business to or on the Veterinary Professionals who work for that business or on its behalf to recommend certain diagnostics, treatment options or referrals; and	any instructions, incentives, undue influence or (actual or perceived) undue pressure from the Veterinary Business to or on the Veterinary Professionals who work for that business or on its behalf to recommend certain diagnostics, treatment options or referrals; and	The Final Report used the terms "undue influence" and "undue pressure on veterinary professionals". The Final Report also noted that the intended outcome was that Vets could give advice "without undue influence from a veterinary business". Influence alone is an inappropriately wide formulation, which would risk capturing entirely legitimate policy/guidance. Linnaeus sees no reason why the Order should diverge from the Final Report. The Explanatory Note should also re-insert "undue".
14(7)	The Primary Notice must be displayed in at least A2 size and Secondary Notices must be displayed in at least A3 size.	The Primary Notice must be displayed in at least A3~~A2~~ size and Secondary Notices must be displayed in at least A3 size.	Requiring notices in A2 size is impractical for many waiting rooms (or reception areas if the FOP has no waiting room). Such rooms are already required to display other notices under this Order -

Art.	Draft text	Linnaeus' proposed changes	Linnaeus' comments
			Price List and Parasiticide Price List (Arts. 7 and 8), Pet Care Plan Standard Information (Art. 9), that the Complaint Process is available and display the Decision Tree signage (Art. 21). Waiting rooms (or reception areas) typically also have other necessary signage (e.g., Health and Safety Law poster, notices about CCTV, fire safety etc). Such rooms may also be used for promotional materials and used to display items such as medication, food and pet care products, further reducing available wall space. Requiring an A2 minimum notice size will make it difficult for practices to comply. An A3 minimum notice size is sufficiently clear and prominent (as accepted for the Secondary Notice in consulting rooms), while giving practices the flexibility to use A2 where space allows.
25(4), 25(5)	(4) If a Veterinary Business becomes aware that it is not compliant with any requirement in any part of this Order, except Part 5, it must report this non-compliance to the RCVS within 14 days of becoming aware that it is not compliant. (5) If a Veterinary Business becomes aware that it is not compliant with any requirement in Part 5 of this Order, it must report this non-compliance to	(4) Subject to Article 25(6) and 25(7), ~~I~~if a Veterinary Business becomes aware that it is not compliant with any requirement in any part of this Order, except Part 5, it must report this non-compliance to the RCVS within 14 days of becoming aware that it is not compliant. (5) Subject to Article 25(6) and 25(7), ~~I~~if a Veterinary Business becomes aware that it is not compliant with any	The current drafting requires every instance of non-compliance to be reported, however minor or technical (for example, a link to the Complaint Process is temporarily broken owing to a website update/malfunction, or a digital copy of a Written Prescription is accidentally sent to a wrong email address so it is not received within the deadline). It therefore has the potential to generate numerous reports to the RCVS and the CMA.

Art.	Draft text	Linnaeus' proposed changes	Linnaeus' comments
	the CMA within 14 days of becoming aware that it is not compliant.	requirement in Part 5 of this Order, it must report this non-compliance to the CMA within 14 days of becoming aware that it is not compliant. (6) A Veterinary Business is not required to report non-compliance under Article 25(4) or 25(5) where it reasonably determines that the non-compliance is minor or technical (as determined in accordance with guidance issued by the CMA) and is resolved by the Veterinary Business within 14 days of becoming aware. (7) The requirements under Articles 25(4) and 25(5) do not apply during the periods provided for in Article 3(2). If relevant Veterinary Business has become aware of non-compliance and that non-compliance has not been remedied by the end of those applicable periods, the 14-day periods referred to in Articles 25(4) or 25(5) begin on the first day after that period ends.	Linnaeus has therefore added Art. 25(6) to provide a narrow exception for non-compliance that is minor or technical (as determined in accordance with guidance issued by the CMA) and is resolved within 14 days of becoming aware. Under paragraph 3.11(b)(ii) of the RCVS Undertaking, the RCVS will already be required to split the number of cases of non-compliance between "minor or technical and serious or repeated breaches (in accordance with guidance provided by the CMA)." This would reduce the cost and burden on veterinary businesses, the RCVS and the CMA. Veterinary Businesses are already required to submit annual Attestations which, under Art. 24(6)(c), need to identify any requirement of the Order with which they have failed to comply. Minor or technical non-compliance would therefore be disclosed in those Attestations. The proposed amendment simply avoids the disproportionate burden of requiring such matters to be reported individually and on an ongoing basis, while reserving self-reporting for non-compliance that does not fall within the limited exception proposed.

Art.	Draft text	Linnaeus' proposed changes	Linnaeus' comments
			Linnaeus has added Art. 3(2) above as the Order does not currently provide a reasonable implementation period where there is a change in ownership of a Veterinary Business after the relevant Compliance Date. The reporting obligations should therefore be aligned with the 90-day and 30 Working Day implementation periods. Linnaeus has therefore made edits and added Art. 25(7) to suspend the obligation to report breaches to the CMA and RCVS during those periods.

2. The Explanatory Note to the Order

Para.	Draft text	Linnaeus' proposed changes	Linnaeus' comment
21	Part 8 (Enforcement, Monitoring and Compliance) contains provisions relating to enforcement and compliance, including an obligation on Veterinary Businesses to supply the RCVS with Attestations.	Part 8 (Enforcement, Monitoring and Compliance) contains provisions relating to enforcement and compliance, including an obligation on Veterinary Businesses to supply the RCVS and/or the CMA with Attestations.	An Attestation with respect to Part 5 of the Order must be submitted to the CMA (whereas Attestations in respect of Parts 2, 3, 4, 6 and 7 should be submitted to the RCVS).
27	Article 2 includes definitions of various terms used in the Substantive Order. It also provides that words or expressions used in the Substantive Order have the same meaning as in the Final Report, unless they have been defined otherwise in the	Article 2 includes definitions of various terms used in the Substantive Order. ~~It also provides that words or expressions used in the Substantive Order have the same meaning as in the Final Report, unless they have been defined otherwise in the~~	Consistent with general principles of clarity and certainty, it is not helpful for the Order to rely on references to the Final Report (given it is approximately 1,000 pages). It would be preferable for the Order to be

Para.	Draft text	Linnaeus' proposed changes	Linnaeus' comment
	Substantive Order and/or the context requires it. The same applies to words or expressions in this Explanatory Note.	~~Substantive Order and/or the context requires it. The same applies to words or expressions in this Explanatory Note.~~	capable of standing alone, with each term defined within the Order itself.
[✂]	[✂]	[✂]	[✂]
125	Article 13(2) specifies that the written policies and procedures must be designed and implemented in a way which is sufficient to address the potential for conflict between: (a) any instructions, incentives, influence or (actual or perceived) pressure from a Veterinary Business to or on their Veterinary Professionals to recommend certain diagnostics, treatment options or referrals; and	Article 13(2) specifies that the written policies and procedures must be designed and implemented in a way which is sufficient to address the potential for conflict between: (a) any instructions, incentives, undue influence or (actual or perceived) undue pressure from a Veterinary Business to or on their Veterinary Professionals to recommend certain diagnostics, treatment options or referrals; and	The Final Report used the terms "undue influence" and "undue pressure on veterinary professionals". The Final Report also noted that the intended outcome was that Vets could give advice "without undue influence from a veterinary business". Influence alone is an inappropriately wide formulation, which would risk capturing entirely legitimate policy/guidance. Linnaeus sees no reason why the Explanatory Note should diverge from the Final Report and considers that "undue" should be re-inserted.
137	Articles 14(12), 14(13) and 14(14) provide that invoices and receipts which are given to Pet Owners using FOP services must contain the Invoice and Receipt Notification statement which: (a) explains written prescriptions are available; (b) includes the written prescription fee price for the first medication prescribed within a consultation; and (c) a statement that Pet Owners may make a significant	Articles 14(12), 14(13) and 14(14) provide that invoices and receipts which are given to Pet Owners using FOP services must contain the Invoice and Receipt Notification statement which: (a) explains written prescriptions are available; (b) includes the written prescription fee price for the first medication prescribed within a consultation; and (c) a statement that Pet Owners may make a significant	Invoices and receipts may have a few different font sizes (e.g. the company name at the top may be in a larger font), whereas the main body of an invoice or receipt is typically all the same size. The drafting has been amended to reflect the wording in the Order, namely "in the same font and no smaller than the main text used for the invoice or receipt".

Para.	Draft text	Linnaeus' proposed changes	Linnaeus' comment
	saving if they purchase medication from third party retailers. The wording of the statement must be identical to that contained in the Substantive Order and made in font which is no smaller than the rest of the text used in the invoice or receipt.	saving if they purchase medication from third party retailers. The wording of the statement must be identical to that contained in the Substantive Order and made in font which is no smaller than the main~~rest of the~~ text used in the invoice or receipt.	
168	Article 20(5) requires that, where a Pet Owner is considering purchasing Cremation Services, the Veterinary Business must ensure that clear pricing information is provided for both individual and communal cremations. The business must:	Article 20(5) requires that, where a Pet Owner is considering purchasing Cremation Services, the Veterinary Business must ensure that clear pricing information is provided for both individual cremations (if offered) and communal cremations. The business must:	The drafting has been amended to make clear that Veterinary Businesses must provide the price of the communal cremation (given Veterinary Businesses are now required to offer communal cremations), and individual cremations (only if these are offered).
172	(e) when an Actionable Complaint arises, provide the Pet Owner with the complaint process and a named contact whom the Pet Owner may contact about their complaint;[13] FN 13 = A named contact may be a veterinary or non-veterinary staff member and in large groups could be a person performing centralised role covering multiple Practices. The role of the named contact is to provide the Pet Owner with one person with whom they can discuss their complaint.	(e) when an Actionable Complaint arises, provide the Pet Owner with the complaint process (either by providing a link to the Complaint Process on its website or a hard copy of the process) and a named contact whom the Pet Owner may contact about their complaint;[13] FN 13 = A named contact may be a veterinary or non-veterinary staff member and in large groups could be a person performing centralised role covering multiple Practices. The role of the named contact is to provide the Pet Owner with one person with whom they can discuss their complaint.	The drafting has been amended to clarify how the Veterinary Business may provide the Complaint Process to the Pet Owner.

Para.	Draft text	Linnaeus' proposed changes	Linnaeus' comment
192	Articles 25(1) and (2) require Veterinary Businesses to supply information and documents to the RCVS and CMA, when requested to do so, for the purposes of allowing the RCVS and CMA to monitor Veterinary Businesses' compliance with the Substantive Order and for the CMA to review the effectiveness of the Substantive Order.	Articles 25(1) and (2) require Veterinary Businesses to supply information and documents to the RCVS and CMA (other than information or documents covered by legal professional privilege), when requested to do so, for the purposes of allowing the RCVS and CMA to monitor Veterinary Businesses' compliance with the Substantive Order and for the CMA to review the effectiveness of the Substantive Order.	The drafting has been updated to include the exemption for privileged information as noted in the Order.
193	Article 25(3) provides that Veterinary Businesses shall have a duty to keep for a specified period records relating to the operation of any provision of the Substantive Order that are specified in writing by the CMA or the RCVS. Veterinary Businesses must produce such records if requested to do so by the CMA or the RCVS.	Article 25(3) provides that Veterinary Businesses shall have a duty to keep for a specified period records relating to the operation of any provision of the Substantive Order that are specified in writing by the CMA or the RCVS. Veterinary Businesses must produce such records if requested to do so by the CMA or the RCVS, other than information or documents covered by legal professional privilege.	The drafting has been updated to include the exemption for privileged information as noted in the Order.

3. The Veterinary Services Market Investigation Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons Undertakings 2026

Para.	Draft text	Linnaeus' proposed changes	Linnaeus' comments
4.5	Before making the Find a Vet Information publicly available on the Find a Vet Platform, the RCVS shall carry out user testing on the design and functionality of the Find a Vet Platform, and shall consult with Relevant Veterinary Businesses as it considers appropriate and take reasonable account of representations received in response to such consultation.	Before making the Find a Vet Information publicly available on the Find a Vet Platform, the RCVS shall carry out user testing on the design and functionality of the Find a Vet Platform, and shall consult with all Relevant Veterinary Businesses~~ as it considers appropriate~~ and shall take reasonable account of representations received in response to such consultation.	Linnaeus does not consider it appropriate for the RCVS to have discretion over which Relevant Veterinary Businesses are given the opportunity to comment on the Find a Vet Platform, the Sharing Criteria and the Decision Tree, each of which is important to Relevant Veterinary Businesses. Linnaeus has therefore proposed drafting to make clear that the RCVS must give all Relevant Veterinary Businesses the opportunity to make representations, while retaining the requirement that the RCVS shall take reasonable account of representations (and retaining the RCVS' discretion as to whether and how it consults other stakeholders in relation to the Decision Tree).
4.8	The RCVS shall consult Relevant Veterinary Businesses and other relevant stakeholders on the Sharing Criteria as it considers appropriate and take reasonable account of representations received in response to any such consultation.	The RCVS shall consult all Relevant Veterinary Businesses and such other relevant stakeholders (as it considers appropriate) on the Sharing Criteria ~~as it considers appropriate~~ and take reasonable account of representations received in response to any such consultation.	See Linnaeus' comments in the first row of Table 3.
7.4	The RCVS shall consult Relevant Veterinary Businesses, trade associations and other persons, as it considers appropriate, on the Decision	The RCVS shall consult all Relevant Veterinary Businesses, and such trade associations and other persons~~,~~ (as it considers appropriate), on the Decision	See Linnaeus' comments in the first row of Table 3.

Para.	Draft text	Linnaeus’ proposed changes	Linnaeus’ comments
	Tree and take reasonable account of representations received in response.	Tree and take reasonable account of representations received in response.	