



Cutting Cost without Compromising on Welfare

Equine charities receive a large number of calls every month from horse owners seeking alternative homes for their animals. There are over one million horses and donkeys in the UK and the charitable sector has limited space available and must prioritise welfare and rescue cases. Welfare organisations simply do not have the resources to take in all the horses whose owners can no longer afford to care for them. However, the Donkey Sanctuary will always provide a permanent home for any donkey or mule certified fit to travel.

This information sheet is one of two aimed at helping owners in difficult circumstances. This is the first and aims to help owners plan for the future and reduce costs without compromising their horse's welfare. The accompanying document, 'Responsible Re-homing', outlines the main options available if you find that having a horse is an expense you can definitely no longer afford. The term horse is used to cover all domestic equine species, including horses, ponies, donkeys, hinnies and mules.

Always Plan Ahead

Anyone considering horse ownership should look into the cost, care and commitment required before deciding to take a horse on. There are three areas of expense you must be prepared for:

- Routine maintenance (e.g. livery bills, feed, bedding, insurance)
- Unforeseen circumstances (e.g. accident, illness and equipment damages)
- Euthanasia and disposal of the body. This may become necessary at any point in a horse's life. It is far better to make provision for this well before you need it than to find you're struggling to afford it when the time comes.

It is worth thinking about the re-homing potential of any horse before you take on ownership so that you are prepared for the future. Prior to purchase, it is essential to ensure that you are aware of any existing or likely issues you may have to deal with, including behavioural problems. The horse should undergo a pre-purchase veterinary examination.

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Caring for a horse properly is never going to be cheap, but there are areas where you can minimise costs.

1. Feeding

The majority of horses manage very well on a forage-based diet and if necessary one vitamin and mineral supplement. A veterinary surgeon or nutritionist can advise whether your horse really needs additional feed or supplements. Fortnightly weigh taping and body condition scoring will help you monitor your horse's health and could save you money. Horse weigh tapes do not work for donkeys; use a heart-girth measurement instead (please contact the Donkey Sanctuary for advice on taking these measurements).

2. Bedding

There are many bedding products on the market. Look into alternatives and decide what will work best for you and your horse. For example, although there is a high initial expense in fitting rubber matting, it can soon pay for itself in reduced bedding costs.

3. Livery / location

One of the biggest costs for many owners is a livery yard fee. Review the facilities you are paying for to check that you do need and use everything you are paying for. If you are paying for someone else to provide all or part of your horse's day-to-day care, it may reduce costs if you were able to do more yourself, even on a temporary basis.

Many horses can do very well on permanent turnout. It could be worth looking around for a suitable grass livery or renting a field, which can be even cheaper if it is shared with friends.



4. Horse share

To reduce costs in all areas, look into sharing your horse with someone else or keeping the horse on working livery. This will also reduce your workload.

5. Working together

If you share a yard with other people, why not club together to save money and time:

- Many feed, forage and bedding suppliers may offer reduced rates if they deliver in bulk.
- Ask veterinary surgeons, farriers and other professionals if they can reduce rates for group bookings.
- Save fuel by sharing transport whenever you can
- Work as a team with other owners to share daily duties, this will save time and fuel.

6. Routine veterinary care

Discuss worming and feeding routines with your veterinary surgeon to make sure you are using the most effective and economical regimes. BEVA horse health programmes may be helpful: go to www.beva.org.uk

7. Farriery

Discuss the shoeing options for your horse with your farrier; you may find your horse doesn't need to have a full set of shoes. If there is not much wear on the horse's shoes your farrier may be able to refit them.

8. Resist marketing

Horses have simple needs. When money is in short supply think very carefully about what is REALLY needed for your horse's welfare. Make sure you are not buying unnecessary supplements, rugs or equipment. Looking after existing equipment helps it last longer, even if it starts to show its age.

False Economies

There are some essential areas of horse care where corners should never be cut. These are the fundamentals of responsible horse ownership; short-term savings can put the horse's welfare at risk and can cost the owner a lot more in the long run. The essentials include:

- Proper veterinary care. Do not be tempted to diagnose and treat a condition yourself.
- Vaccinations. Lapsed vaccinations leave your horse vulnerable to disease.
- Regular hoof care. Taking shoes off to save money without consulting your veterinary surgeon or farrier could lead to lameness and expense as some horses are not able to go barefoot.
- Worming and dental checks. These essentials can be reviewed, as outlined above, but not avoided.
- Professional services. Do not employ a cheaper, unqualified person to do a professional's job.
- Repairs to damaged property and equipment are vital to safeguard your horse's safety and security.
- Insurance. If you are not insured against veterinary fees you must be confident that you could pay an unexpected veterinary bill. Third party liability cover is highly advisable for all horse owners.

Be Realistic

It is vital to look ahead and budget effectively to meet the needs of your horse. Ideally, put a little away every month or when you can, to help you manage if and when unforeseen problems arise.

Be realistic about the effect on your horse, both short and long term, should your financial circumstances change. Not facing up to looming difficulties can greatly reduce the options available to you once the problem has become too overwhelming to ignore. Taking advice on personal budget management before your finances get out of hand may also help you make the savings necessary to keep your horse.

This leaflet has been produced by the member organisations of the National Equine Welfare Council.

For further advice, please contact the NEWC office on 01926 866655 or e-mail info@newc.co.uk for details of your local NEWC member.