

**National Assembly for Wales All Party Group for Animal Welfare (APGAW) Meeting
10.05.05**

In attendance:

Chair, Lorraine Barrett AM (Lab, Cardiff South and Penarth)
 Claire Lawson, RSPCA Cymru Wales
 Neil White, RSPCA
 Sian Edwards, Dogs Trust
 Leslie Thomas, Greyhound Rescue Wales
 Phillip Jones, International League for the Protection of Horses
 Wendy Davies, British Horse Society
 Huw Thomas, NFU Cymru
 Lionel Ford, Donkey Sanctuary
 Roy Peckham, Pit Pony Sanctuary
 Rachel Bartlett, Pit Pony Sanctuary
 Superintendent Carl Close - Police Liaison Officer, Welsh Assembly Government.

Secretariat: Dylan Bowen, Morgan Allen Moore Cymru

Item 1: Chair's Welcome and Introduction

Lorraine Barrett AM welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced Sian Edwards, Welsh Campaigns Manager for the Dogs Trust and Neil White, Senior Local Government Advisor for the RSPCA, adding that they will be giving presentations relating to stray dogs and the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act. Mrs Barrett stated that the Act had been steered through Parliament thanks to Alun Michael MP, and though now with a different portfolio added that he was still happy to talk to the group about the Act.

Mrs Barrett also referred to the successful launch of the 'Find a Home' poster and leaflet campaign for greyhound racing tracks though added that there are still a number of issues that need to be resolved.

Item 2: Stray Dogs and Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act

Neil White, Senior Local Government Advisor for the RSPCA thanked the group for the invitation and introduced his presentation on the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act. Mr White outlined a number of clauses included in the bill and made the following comments:

Clause 55: Dog Control Orders.

- An order can cover;
 - ❖ Dog fouling.
 - ❖ Dogs on leads.
 - ❖ Exclusion of dogs from land.
 - ❖ Number of dogs that can be taken onto land.
- The legislation is defined quite widely, and will be completed by regulations made in the National Assembly for Wales.
- Orders will be able to be made by local authorities and community councils.
- Orders will be enforced by Fixed Penalty Notices

Clause 68: Stray Dogs

- Removes police responsibility for stray dogs.
- Local authorities will be solely responsible – this streamlining of the process is designed to make the issue more transparent and accountable.
- However, this will only happen once the confusion over funding is cleared up.
- The Local Government Association is currently working on the resolution of the funding issue.
- The RSPCA, along with the Kennel Club and Dog's Trust voiced concerns to the Government regarding the coverage of stray dogs services. In response, Defra released a statement addressing these concerns.
- Some police forces have already withdrawn their stray dog services.
- Local authorities are now examining the way forward, and this is an opportunity for the charities involved to open a dialogue to express their desire to be more involved.

Questions and Comments

- Wendy Davies, British Horse Society expressed concern that the level of authority will be diminished as the police will no longer be involved in stray dogs' services.
- Neil White, RSPCA replied that the major concern is that the police provide a 24 hour service, whereas very few local authorities provide that level of service. Also reiterated concern over the funding issue.
- Phillip Jones, International League for the Protection of Horses stated that the police operate to a very tight budget and questioned whether they would want to give any money to local authorities to pay for stray dogs services.
- Lorraine Barrett AM stated that formula funding is an issue and stated another concern is that it is difficult to identify who is responsible.
- Superintendent Close reinforced that Clause 68 will bring clarification that is long overdue. Whilst responsibility for stray dogs will be formally transferred from the Police to Local Authorities, the reality is that most forces have not accepted stray dogs for the past ten years or so. He also pointed out that the Police had never received specific funding for providing such services and that future funding for Local Authorities in this area will undoubtedly be a major issue.
- Leslie Thomas, Greyhound Rescue Wales stated that the situation in Welsh police stations is unsatisfactory and cited the example of Merthyr Tydfil where a notice was put up saying that stray dogs would not be accepted. Asked how long this state of limbo will last.
- On the issue of dog wardens, Neil White stated that a local authority does not have to have a dog warden however they do have to nominate a person responsible for stray dogs.
- Lorraine Barrett AM stated that there could be a regional dog warden service in Wales which could cover several small local authorities in order to keep costs down.
- Wendy Davies expressed the importance of informing the public of the changes being made relating to stray dogs, and added that lessons need to be learnt from the experience of the introduction of horse passports.
- Lorraine Barrett AM stated that the Assembly Government will have to take responsibility for informing the public adding that the opportunity will come when the related regulations are passed in Wales.
- Leslie Thomas stated that there is a need to publicise the changes and noted that it is also an opportunity to clarify the responsibilities of voluntary organisations. Also asked if a voluntary organisation can take in a stray dog.
- Neil White responding stated that an information leaflet has been produced and also answered that voluntary organisations cannot collect stray dogs.
- Claire Lawson proposed to send a letter to Sue Essex AM in order to seek clarification of the situation in Wales.

Item 3: Presentation by Sian Edwards, Dogs Trust.

Sian Edwards of the Dog's Trust introducing her presentation stated that she was going to talk about the stray dog situation in Wales but also that it would be advantageous to give some background information on the Dog's Trust.

Sian made the following comments during her presentation:

- Dog's Trust is well known as a re-homing organisation but stated that they campaign against irresponsible ownership and are attempting to change people's moral obligations to their animals.
- The campaign initially started in the north east of England, and focused on social groups D and E, which had shown the highest level of strays and has the highest volume of complaints.
- It started as a microchip campaign, and has continued to grow. The partnership with local authorities is strong and the Dog's Trust is also keen to build strong links with other groups for example, PDSA and RSPCA. Also working with local charities, for example, Greyhound Rescue Wales.
- Dog's Trust is also examining the option of employing a youth education officer who will work in schools and youth groups.
- Sian also informed the group of the following Dog's Trust initiatives;
 - Free micro chipping to all on benefits or pensions.
 - Free neutering initiative - £25 normally. 250 vets on the scheme in Wales.
 - Dog's Trust website – fact sheets available to download.

Questions and Comments

- Several members raised concerns relating to pound kennels and the need for a minimum standard of care.
- In reply Sian Edwards stated that kennels are being licensed by local authorities but there are questions over their experience and expertise. Also noted that the Animal Welfare Bill may help but that it is not an absolute solution.
- Phillip Jones, International League for the Protection of Horses inquired if there had been any problems with puppy farmers.
- Sian replied that puppy farms are not dealt with under the current campaign but added that the Dog's Trust is dealing with problems on a one-to-one level, for example, trying to educate individual dog owners against breeding. Regarding large scale commercial farms, the Dog's Trust is attempting to identify farms that are not licensed and then inform the local authorities.

Item 4: Any Other Business

- Claire Lawson confirmed the date of the summer conference as 27th July and asked members of the group for suggestions for possible topics.
- Claire also stated that work on the website is going ahead, and added that a mailing will be distributed soon requesting contact details and links for the website. It is hoped that the website will be launched in the Autumn.

Dylan Bowen