

PE1396/M

Dear Chris,

Please find enclosed a resume of the opinions, suggestions and proposals arising from the meeting held by Staffordshire Rescue Scotland on 15th. November.

The meeting included representatives from our own organisation, SSPCA, Dogs Trust, Royal Heart Greyhound Rescue, the Scottish Kennel Club, Cocker Spaniel Club, Scottish Staffordshire Bull Terrier Rescue, North Lanarkshire Council Animal Welfare Officers, West Lothian Council Dog Warden, Pet Fostering Service Scotland, Bandeath Stray Dog Shelter and the Dog Aid Society.

All of the representatives present have had sight of the resume and agree the contents are an accurate reflection of the proceedings.

Several other organisations offered apologies and have been kept up to date and several more have now asked for copies of the resume in order to decide whether they will come on board with us,

Yours sincerely,

Les Hunter,
Secretary/Trustee
Staffordshire Rescue Scotland

At a meeting on 15th November 2011, organised by Staffordshire Rescue Scotland and attended by twenty two people representing twelve Animal Welfare Organisations and Charities, Local Authority Dog Wardens and Animal Welfare Officers, the present situation regarding the over-breeding and irresponsible ownership of dogs was discussed at some length.

As already promised, we are now in a position to relay the recommendations of that meeting to the Petitions Committee, which we are glad to learn has agreed to continue its examination of the petition. We hope that the advice from our meeting will be of assistance in determining the outcome of the petition.

Microchipping of all dogs should be mandatory. Several national data bases already exist and we believe it would not be difficult to encourage the data holders to cooperate in providing a single point of access to authorised persons. Dogs Trust has already offered free microchips to Scottish Local Authorities, on the back of a successful campaign in several London Boroughs which has contributed to a reduction in the number of strays. Local Authorities here do not appear to be responding to that offer with any alacrity and should be persuaded not to look gift horses in the mouth.

At present it is the responsibility of a new owner to change the details of microchipping held on the database. If one sells a car it is the responsibility of the vendor to inform the DVLA of the change of ownership. It should be the same with dogs. People are currently able to dodge responsibility for dogs by claiming to have sold or given them away. If a dog is picked up by an authority, for any reason, the onus for the dog should fall on the person last registered as the owner. There should be a financial penalty for failing to update the information, and for failing to identify the person who received the dog from them.

Local Authorities and Housing Associations should be advised to insert in their tenancy agreements that tenants are prohibited from keeping dogs which are not microchipped and neutered unless they are a licensed breeder. This might be achievable without legislation, but, in the long run, enforceable legislation would be more effective.

Education Authorities can contribute to the prevention of future problems by taking advantage of offers from Charities and Welfare Organisations, as well as their own Authorities' Animal Welfare Officers and Dog Wardens to offer instruction in responsible dog ownership to their students. Different approaches could be used to Primary and Secondary pupils, taking account of maturity and understanding, but the programmes must be ongoing and sustained in order to change cultural misconceptions such as the wholly mistaken belief that a Bitch benefits from having a litter of pups before she is spayed. There are a great many myths about dogs in our society which require to be dispelled.

Personnel in daily contact with the public such as Police, Social Workers and Health Visitors should receive basic training in recognising animals at risk or being exploited. In England police forces already appoint Dog Liaison Officers with specialised training. In Scotland agreement already exists between Social Work Departments and the SSPCA to share information about households with children at risk or animals at risk since abuse of both is often related. It is not impossible to take this a stage further and educate personnel to recognise the obvious signs of dogs being unnaturally aggressive or bitches having been used for breeding. Apart from any welfare concern, people in receipt of benefits are breeding litters of pups for sale and not declaring the income to either HMRC or the Benefits agency, both an offence against current law and a huge contribution to the stray and at risk dog population.

Again, various Charities are prepared to contribute expertise to training programmes.

Advertising of animals 'free to good homes' and for sale or barter on forums such as Gumtree, shop windows and supermarket notice boards should be absolutely prohibited. Local authorities, Libraries and Police Stations could keep a register of legitimate rehoming organisations for those people who have a genuine need to pass an animal on to a new owner.

We understand that it is already an offence, under The Licensing of Animal Dealers (Young Cats and Young Dogs) (Scotland) Regulations 2009, to sell more than two puppies or kittens in any one year without a licence to trade in animals. We suggest that this legislation

could perhaps be used to control sources of young animals such as Gumtree, free-ad papers etc.

The cost of neutering has been addressed in the past in Clackmananshire with Veterinary Practices, Local Authorities and Owners sharing the cost. This was apparently successful in increasing neutering but stopped for lack of Local Authority funding. We recognise that these are straightened times but also contend that, in the long run, money would be saved by such a scheme. The veterinary fees for neutering vary enormously across the country, the general trend being for rural vets to charge less than their urban colleagues.

The Petitions Committee could, perhaps, pursue this with the Royal Colleges and the British Veterinary Association to see if some degree of standardisation is possible. If, for instance, I am able to tell someone from another area that my dog was neutered for £150 and they are then informed by their local veterinary practice that the cost will be £300, they will be discouraged from pursuing the matter any further.

Current legislation on dog breeding is not uniformly enforced and is probably unenforceable. The subject should be revisited and the law revised, with full and proper consultation. It must be recognised that the Domestic Dog, *Canis Familiaris*, is man's oldest and only voluntary animal companion. This companionship is hugely beneficial to a vast number of people. Mark Twain wrote, 'A boy should have two things, a dog and a mother who will let him have one.' We believe that he was not wrong and that ownership should be encouraged, but only if that ownership is responsible. Licensing of owners should be examined on the basis of at least a little knowledge, free from misconception and misperception. Dogs are neither status symbols nor weapons and their regard as such should be dispelled, nor are they money making machines and their use as such should discontinue.

The respondent to the Committee from the Scottish Government's Rural and Environmental Directorate is obviously knowledgeable about the finance involved in the treatment of substance abuse since she was able to produce such accurate figures. Less than one percent of that budget would go a considerable distance towards tackling the present problems and preventing future ones.