

Cross-Party Group on Animal Welfare - Grŵp Trawsbleidiol ar Les Anifeiliaid

Date: 06/11/2023

Location: Teams

In Attendance

Carolyn Thomas MS

Luke Fletcher MS

Jane Dodds MS

Mike Hedges MS (Attended by Support Staff Ryland Doyle)

Jayne Bryant MS (Attended by Support Staff Lily Gray)

Dan Rose (Support Staff, Carolyn Thomas MS)

Shahinoor Alom (Secretariat, League Against Cruel Sports)

Jessamy Korotoga (Animal Aid)

Fiona Pereira (Animal Aid)

Billie-Jade Thomas (RSPCA Cymru)

Vanessa Waddon (Hope Rescue)

PC David Allen (North Wales Police)

Alex Findlow (Dogs Trust UK)

Paula Boyden (Chair of the Links Group)

Bronwen Dennis (Blue Cross)

Ed Hayes (The Kennel Club)

Daryl Gordon (Cats Protection UK)

Natasha Wright (Nature Watch)

Mal Ingham (Former Head Ranger and Wildlife Officer in North Wales)

Apologies

Peredur Owen Griffiths

Summary of Meeting

Introduction, approval of minutes and update on actions.

CT introduced the meeting of the Cross-Party Group by acknowledging the ban on snaring coming into effect. She thanked everyone that took part in the campaign to make that happen.

Following on from the actions of the previous meeting:

- a letter to the Minister Lesley Griffiths has been drafted by Crustacean Compassion and will be sent by the chair on behalf of the CPG.
- The minister will be invited to a future meeting, most likely in the AGM meeting in Spring/Summer 2024, this is because the Animal Welfare Establishments consultation will be coming out toward the end of this Senedd term so it would be fitting to bring in the Minister following the consultation.

Criminal activity pertaining to animal welfare.

PC Dave Allen, Wildlife and Heritage Crime Officer, North Wales Police

The North Wales Police Rural Crime Team (NWPRCT) were the first rural crime team in England and Wales, set up in September 2013. 75% of the rural criminal activity within North Wales is within farming with the remainder being environmental, wildlife crime as well as heritage crime.

There are ten members of the NWPRCT scattered all over North Wales. The officers work very closely with Natural Resources Wales. The team also works closely with RSPCA too especially with domestic issues arising.

DA explained that there were instances of poor animal welfare that leads to a crime and other instances where crimes lead to poor animal welfare.

An example of the first is dog attacks on cattle. There are about 120 to 150 reported dog attacks on cattle per year in North Wales and that's just the tip of the iceberg with many attacks going unreported. The dog attacks were said to have occurred due to poor dog ownership and management and an inability to adequately tender to the specific needs to certain breeds results in such attacks.

An example of a crime leading to animal welfare. Due to the cost-of-living crisis, there has been a number of successful and unsuccessful attempts at livestock thefts, in particular sheep. There have been instances of sheep slaughtered in Anglesey and Deeside.

DA also showed images of "badger baiting/digging" activity taking place in rural areas of North Wales. He added that there is evidence that showed a link between organised criminal groups and this type of activity as a form of initiation for young people. It is a way for humans to build that aggression and discipline needed of a gang member.

No actions from this item.

Identifying signs of animal abuse by the Link Group.

Dr Paula Bowden Chair of the Link Group and Veterinary Director of Dogs Trust.

PD shed information about the link between abuse of people and abuse of animals. Although one cannot conclusively say that partner abuse is a determining factor for animal abuse, it should be giving professionals an index of suspicion that there may be other abuses taking place in that environment.

The Links Group was set up in 2001, became a charity at the end of 2021 with the principle to encourage people to communicate and cross report with regards dealing with suspected cases of abuse.

On average, a victim of domestic abuse is going to experience around about 50 abusive episodes before they get any meaningful help despite trying to leave that abusive environment a number of times. The delay in fleeing from an abusive situation for some is down to not wanting to leave their pets behind at the hands of their perpetrator. Most refuges do not accept pets. One lady, used as an example, did not want to go into a refuge and leave her dog behind at the hands of a perpetrator. Unfortunately, she sadly he took her life. As a result of that, and some work carried out by Links colleague Mary Wakeham showed that nine in ten domestic abuses would also target the family pet, either through deliberate or the threat of harm.

Phil Arkell wrote this paper back almost 30 years ago now entitled: Child abuse, animal abuse and veterinarian. What he basically said was that there was growing evidence of a link between violence to people and violence to animals and vets are important because we see the results of the violence in our animal patients. PD added that this extends to the whole veterinary team.

Further research undertaken by a forensic pathologist called Heller Monroe and Mike Thrusfield led to a series of papers. Evidence overwhelmingly highlighted the similarities between the injuries that we see in animals and the injuries that that we see in children.

PD urged the importance for those in human healthcare settings and animal health settings to speak to one another where suspicions have been aroused. Repetitive injuries should be giving a strong index of suspicion.

One case was presented in which the RSPCA prosecuted somebody for torture of a dog. This was of someone stubbing their cigarettes out on their dog's head. When this dog was postmortemed, every rib in her body had been broken at some point.

Animals most vulnerable or at risk are younger animals similar to humans. The social background and the challenge here is that people that are perhaps more educated can be much more plausible. There

were two cases that were reported apart as part of Helen Monroe's work. One was a medic because they'd actually kicked their own dog so badly they'd ruptured its bladder and the other was a vet because the way the vet treated the patients, perpetrators are mostly male.

Actions

- CT to raise the issue of allowing pets with private landlords at the Local Government and Housing Committee.
- CPG to gather more evidence on housing, domestic abuse and pets.
- CT's office to contact Jane Dodds MS (Chair of CPG on Children), Sian Gwenllian (Chair of CPG on Women) and John Griffiths MS (Chair of CPG on Poverty as well as chair of Local Government and Housing Committee) to begin a discussion on the scope of collaborative work moving forward. Including the secretariats of the respective CPGs.

Responsible Dog Ownership Update

Billie-Jade Thomas, RSPCA Cymru

The UK government recently announced that owning, breeding, rehoming, advertising, selling or and allowing XL Bully dogs to stray will be made illegal in Wales and England as of 31st December. So this doesn't apply to Scotland yet. They've yet to confirm more action they're taken with the same being in Northern Ireland, but this is where Wales is at as it stands.

This is the first time that a new breed has been added to the list of banned breeds which falls into Section 1 of the Dangerous Dogs Act since the legislation was introduced in 1991, more than 32 years ago and so this is something that is unprecedented in the way that the sector has not dealt with an additional breed being added to the list before. For those who do currently own XL Bullies, they will be able to keep them, so they can apply for certificates of exemptions by the 1st of February 2024. So that gives them some time, which would allow them to keep their dogs, but they will have to follow legal restrictions such as muslin, microchipping and neutering.

The government will be providing £200 compensation toward the costs of euthanising XL bullies for those owners who don't intend to keep their dog. Any dog will need to be more than 20 inches for a male or 19 inches for the female at the withers before being potentially classed as an XL Bully. This could still lead to large dogs with similar traits to the XL Bully being tight, which is a concern of ours again. Otherwise, the definition is quite poor but it is provided on the UK government's website.

RSPCA Cymru are of the view that a ban is not an effective policy ensuring the safety of people as we've had the Dangerous Dogs Act in place for 32 years and this hasn't reduced the number of hospital admissions for dog bites. There is also concern about the unintended consequences this ban is going to have in many ways. The RSPCA have been required to euthanize 377 prohibited types of dogs to comply with the Dangerous Dogs Act of 1991. With the new addition of XL Bullies, this number is going to grow.

This will have an impact on the housing and rehoming sector as increasing pressure is built on them in addition to the traumatic impact it will have on those involved in the euthanasia process, to put healthy animals down due to a change in the law.

There will also be an added strain on local authorities too since they have a statutory duty to pick up stray dogs and since the new announcement, the number of abandoned and stray American XL bully types is expected to increase.

The RSPCA are calling for the Welsh Government to consider giving support to local authorities so that they can carry out these statutory duties.

There'll also be an impact on police resources because dog legislation officers, those are the specialized police officers that assess prohibited breeds.

We took these calls to the Welsh Government Summit that I'm sure many on the call were also in attendance at on the 18th of October.

No actions from this item.

Any Other Business

- A Welsh Government consultation on animal welfare establishments is expected to come out soon which will consider a question on greyhound issues.
- Next CPG date will be 19th February.