

P-05-895 Rosa's Legacy: Introduce a scheme to help people access veterinary care for their companion animals, Correspondence – Petitioner to Committee, 17.02.20

To the Chair and Members of the Petitions Committee of the Welsh Assembly.

P-05-895 Rosa's Legacy: Introduce a scheme to help people access veterinary care for their companion animals.

Thank you for asking for my response on the recent correspondence you have received and once again making my petition an agenda item.

Response from the BVA.

While I welcome their response, I must admit to being very puzzled by it. I am aware that membership to their organisation is not mandatory (unlike the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) in regards to registering to enable VS and RVN to practice). But still many of their members must have first hand experience of the issues my petition raises.

We support education initiatives, such as the recent #PawPreventProtect campaign from Welsh Government, which help potential owners to consider which pet is most suited to their lifestyle, needs and budget, thus preventing many of the issues mentioned in the petition.

I like many other responsible owners didn't adopt My late Rosa lightly or without considerable thought. As some of you may know I have been involved in the rescue world for many years. Raising much needed funds and awareness and helping to educate others. I have fostered cats and kittens in my own home to alleviate the pressure for many rescues. Rosa was part of my family for eight years, I did everything in my power to ensure her needs were met. But nobody has a crystal ball and the organisation I adopted Rosa from did not test her for FIV. Which I am relieved because if she had been FIV+ they would have euthanised her that is their policy. Instead Rosa went on to have a wonderful life as a cherished member of my family - in stark contrast to her earlier life.

Surely the BVA and their Members must be aware that these issues are seldom black and white and what matters most in these cases are the animals. Who are protected by the Animal Welfare Act (England and Wales) of 2006. Under which owners have a legal obligation to consult a veterinary surgeon.

I also think it's worth remembering here that our Cabinet Secretary Lesley Griffiths AM has acknowledged to your Committee that "I do understand people's circumstances can change" when she confirmed the Welsh Government were looking at such a scheme.

In regards to insurance at present Dog owners whose Dogs have been exempted from breed specific legislation cannot get insurance for veterinary care.

Response from CAWWG.

I greatly welcome this response and the details contained within it are very helpful. I wish to place on record my thanks to their Chair Dr Christine Chapman and their members.

I am aware of the many scheme third sector organisations generously fund. While these provide important treatment, many such schemes center around neutering, spaying and chipping companion animals. Although these schemes are of vital importance sadly they would not assist with the issues I have raised.

Regional differences.

As CAWGW's response states the third sector does sterling work in helping many owners to access veterinary treatment. But it's clear to see there is a large part of Cymru where no such provision is available. The four small animal hospitals (SAH) operated by the PDSA are all in South Wales. In Cardiff (they have two) Swansea and Llanelli. I am aware PDSA's discounted veterinary treatment scheme operates Cymru wide. But is reliant on veterinary practices taking part in the scheme, as I noted in the text of my petition PDSA have changed their criteria for this scheme.

When I attended the launch of CAWGW at the Senedd last year I asked a representative of PDSA about their criteria for the provision of small animal hospitals. I was informed that population figures played a big part in the thought process of providing SAH. So it seems the more rural less populated parts of Cymru (like North West Wales) are almost penalised twice. Coupled with other issues many of you are well aware such as transport provision in very rural areas.

The Blue Cross's provision is also very much South Wales oriented, with their only SAH in Cumbran. I became aware of their Emergency Fund only last year, which I greatly welcome. This shows that Blue Cross themselves see a gap in the provision and are trying hard to address it . Yet I cannot find a veterinary practice in North Wales that promotes this scheme. I certainly wasn't offered this by Independent Vetcare (IVC) with My late Rosa - but euthanisea was repeatedly offered as I have previously stated. Rosa's Clinical Notes from IVC confirm this.

I have read Blue Cross's " Link on the Chain " report and I welcome many of the points they make . Particularly where they acknowledge the benefits that owning a companion animal can bring to a persons wellbeing.

The corporate takeover of the veterinary industry in Cymru.

I did touch on this subject in my last submission but even since then this wagon rolls ever more forward. With the largest corporate company in the UK IVC now owing just short of 1,000 veterinary practices (this includes four out of hours SAH hospitals under their Vets Now branding) . In my part of Cymru (including Ynys Mon/Anglesey) we now only have one **totally** Independent veterinary practice. **1**

As I have stated previously the practice of " upselling " is standard procedure in many if not all of these corporate companies. I certainly witnessed that at my former veterinary practice in Caernarfon (now owned by IVC) when they treated My late Rosa.

I have had veterinary surgeons contact me who are just as concerned as me about the way their profession is going. One VS telling me " the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) have allowed the corporates to sell our profession down the river, many of us don't like it anymore than you do ". I also know that veterinary practices who are Independently run struggle to recruit staff because of the resources these huge corporate companies have.

I have been mindful of the extreme pressure many within the veterinary profession work under. I think this is linked to the corporate takeover. The charity Vetlife set up by those within the veterinary community has recorded an increase in demand for the support they offer.²

In Conclusion - next steps.

Animal welfare is a matter devolved to our Welsh Assembly and Government . I know you feel just as passionately as I do about this issue.

I know My late Rosa was " only a cat " , but I can honestly say her loss had a profound effect on me . Particularly the circumstances surrounding her demise, which to me flagged up many issues. My mental health suffered greatly and when I became fully aware of the way her veterinary practice acted I did contemplate taking my own life. The responsibility you feel for those who have loved in life, doesn't fade away when they have physically left you.

- I welcome CAWGWs points in regard to trying to establish a more comprehensive picture of the help on offer to owners - Cymru wide.
- I am grateful they have also written to the Welsh Government offering their support following on from our Cabinet Secretary's statement . I would like to be part of this initiative.
- The rise of the corporate takeover is a matter for the CMA . Could the Committee raise this matter with them as my MP Hywel William's has done?
- I have met with both Llyr Huws Grufford AM and Andrew RT Davies AM to discuss this issue. Both are concerned and have been very helpful. I now want to try and get this matter onto the agenda for our CCEC. I feel cross party support is vital here .

As ever if I can assist your Committee and Members further, I would be more than willing to do so .

Cofion Linda Joyce-Jones
Arfon Constituency
17/2/2020.

1. <http://www.independentvets.co.uk/>

2. <https://www.vetlife.org.uk/>