

Cross Party Group on Animal Welfare

58th meeting

Committee Room 3

6.00pm Tuesday 1 April 2014

MSPs

Christine Grahame MSP (Convener)
Alison Johnstone MSP (vice-Convener) (to item 4)
Cara Hilton MSP

Associate Members

Peter Macdonald, Horse Rescue Scotland
Brian Robinson, Horse Rescue Scotland/Association of British Riding Schools
John Burns, World Horse Welfare
David Woolfries, COSLA Animal Health and Welfare Strategy Group/Stirling Council
Diane Bain, Borders Beasties
Brian Hosie, British Veterinary Association/Scotland's Rural University College
Jean Fairlie, Scottish Weimaraner Rescue
Colin Shedden, British Association for Shooting and Conservation
Denis Hearsum, National Dog Wardens' Association/Perth and Kinross Council
Laura MacLeod, West Lothian Council
George Leslie, Canine Concern Scotland Trust
Lorraine Currie, Campaign Against Trading of Cats Online
Liz McCulloch, Campaign Against Trading of Cats Online
Sheila Thomson, Scottish Kennel Club
Margaret Donnellan, Dogs Trust
Adam Reed, University of St Andrews
Jacqui Cuff, Cats' Protection
Natalie Constance, Buddies Bunny Rescue
Helene Mauchlen, British Horse Society Scotland
Mauvis Gore, Marine Conservation International
Patricia Saluja, University of Aberdeen
Jennifer Dunn, League Against Cruel Sports
Louise Robertson, OneKind
David Craig, World Horse Welfare
Karen Gray, Rabbits Require Rights Scotland
John Gaffney, COSLA Animal Health and Welfare Strategy Group/North Lanarkshire Council
Libby Anderson, OneKind (Secretary)

Apologies

Claudia Beamish MSP
Mike Flynn, Scottish SPCA
Laura Vallance, Dogs Trust
Alison Pearson, Borders Beasties
Tracy Shiells, Cats Protection
Tricia Colville, British Small Animal Veterinary Association
John Robins, Animal Concern Advice Line
Allison Speers, Ethical Voice for Animals
Wendy Seaton, Ethical Voice for Animals

1. Introductions and apologies

The Convener (CG) opened the meeting and intimated apologies.

2. Minutes of previous meetings

The minutes of 10 December 2013 were approved.

3. Matters arising

Update from CCTV subgroup: CG informed members that the sub-group had met on 28 January and received an update from the Scottish Government on the implementation of Regulation 1099/2009. Scotland was the only UK administration to have implemented the slaughter Regulation so far. The Scottish Government and the Welsh Government had asked the Farm Animal Welfare Committee (FAWC) to examine the question of CCTV in more detail and make recommendations.

A letter had been sent to the Cabinet Secretary asking for more information about existing and potential guidance for the use of CCTV. It was also agreed to ask the Crown Office about existing standards for CCTV evidence used in prosecutions; and to ask the Food Standards Agency if it was aware of any in-house guidance for slaughterhouse staff in the UK.

4. Pet vending issues in Scotland

1) John Gaffney, Animal Health and Welfare Officer for North Lanarkshire Council (JG), gave a presentation on the licensing role of local authorities. The officer's role was to ensure the needs of animals were met whenever they were bred, boarded, hired, sold, exhibited or transported. Breeding and sale of dogs, for example, was covered by specific legislation as well as by the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006. Dogs were bred both in private homes and in commercial kennels, of which there were three in North Lanarkshire. The latter had to be licensed and a typical inspection would cover the physical environment and a check that records were up to date and totally accurate. The animals' conditions would be assessed by a vet on the first visit and by another qualified person on subsequent inspections.

Conditions could vary from licence to licence but broadly speaking all inspections of licensed premises would cover animal welfare, traceability, fire precautions, disease control, safety, health and hygiene. A boarding licence would require checking of over 60 points including the kennel itself, the operation, ensuring the dogs were fit and had proper facilities and a suitable diet, and that their "five needs" (equivalent to the original "Five Freedoms") were being met. Inspections would be tailored for smaller, home-breeding establishments.

Riding establishments hiring out horses for lessons or pony trekking also required a licence. A vet-led initial assessment would check tack, feed, health and safety issues and so on, and would be followed up by further visits.

Pet shops required licences under the Pet Animals Act 1951. JG felt the current position on pet vending over the internet was a real problem: for example, it was impossible for the vendor to check that the purchaser was over 16, as required by law.

Inspections of animals being exhibited in zoos were undertaken jointly between zoo inspectors and local authority officers. Conditions in zoos had improved in the last decade, with conditions for

education, enrichment and other aspects to be met before a licence would be granted. Zoo licensing was time consuming as an inspection visit could not be made in less than half a day.

Collections of animals subject to dangerous wild animal (DWA) licences such as alligators, crocodiles and venomous snakes required thorough safety vetting. For example, vivaria must be kept in rooms with two sets of lockable doors and the owner must have access to a means of calling for assistance and an agreement with the local hospital in case specific anti-venom was required. One DWA collector in North Lanarkshire owned a Gaboon viper, a diamond back rattlesnake and a cobra. It was difficult to ensure that dangerous wild animals had sufficient exercise.

The procedure for licensing began with receipt of an application and the requisite fee. Following police checks, the applicant would be interviewed to see if he possessed the required experience. JG's own experience had developed from carrying out farm inspections for police in Strathclyde to working with councils, establishing training for other local authority inspectors and pet shop owners. He was the only animal licensing officer in North Lanarkshire and agreed that it would be useful to have a second officer.

Alison Johnstone MSP (AJ) asked why home-based breeders had to have a licence but internet sales were not licensed although many vendors would be working from home. JG agreed that this was an anomaly – he would prefer to see internet traders licensed. AJ also asked about the relevance of environmental health standards to animal care. JG said it was part of a range of standards which also included the five needs/freedoms. He aimed for consistent quality control, to be applied as strictly as it was in the food industry.

Lorraine Currie, CATSCO (LC) praised JG's work but said that other councils did not have a dedicated officer for animal health and welfare, and there was no enforcement in these areas. She asked how easy it was to enforce current legislation and punish wrongdoers. JG said some laws were easier to enforce than others: for example, it was not possible to know what happened in a boarding kennel without actually boarding a pet there. Standards could often not be investigated unless a complaint was made. The alternative approach was to talk to operators and encourage them to comply, in their own interests. A report to the Procurator Fiscal was always the last resort.

Helene Mauchlen, British Horse Society (HM) reminded the group that secondary legislation under the 2006 Act was still awaited, including the regulation or licensing of livery stables. An options paper was currently before the Cabinet Secretary and she would like the Group to comment on the options. CG said she was reluctant to support more legislation without seeing full enforcement of the existing laws.

2) Karen Gray, Rabbits Require Rights Scotland (KG) said the public was being sold neglect in pet shops, despite licensing legislation. In February 2014, KG had seen a 16-week-old rabbit at a pet shop in a garden centre. She had decided to buy it as it appeared terrified and was exposed to noise and disturbance. She was given no care information or advice and no questions were asked about her ability to care for a rabbit. She was sold the smallest cage set-up along with the rabbit. KG had complained to the local council which referred her to new model conditions for pet shops. Among other things, these required that rabbits be correctly sexed. The pet shop had displayed a notice saying it could not guarantee the sex of animals. KG felt this was a breach of the model conditions but the council did not object to the sign.

In November 2013 KG had bought a 6-month old rescue rabbit at a pet superstore. It was seen being handled in the “kiddies’ corner”, despite showing symptoms of respiratory disease. As the rescue was a charity arm of the store, it appeared not to have to comply with pet shop licence conditions.

Both of these rabbits were underweight and had dental problems due to bad diet, setting a bad example to customers.

Also in November 2013, in an Edinburgh pet shop, a member of the public had complained about a rabbit with a weepy eye and crusty ear. The shop operator had suggested that she should buy it. A complaint was made to the Scottish SPCA who instructed that the rabbit should see a vet but it was not clear that this had happened.

KG said that rabbit welfare needed a voice. CG said she had also encountered pet shop staff who appeared inexperienced; and she had seen dogs walking around stores close to rabbits, which must stress them. She suggested that the Group write to pet retailers to ask about the training they offered to management and staff, to ensure that animals were provided with appropriate welfare before and after sale. JG commented that Pets at Home had a good training programme to which he had had input, and it should be implemented. KG said unfortunately this was not always the case and training needed to be passed down.

LA said information gathered would also be useful to the Scottish Government as it prepared to look at pet vending legislation.

It was noted that Pets at Home stores often incorporated vets’ surgeries, owned by the stores. Denis Hearsom (DH) was aware of one in the Perth store which was well used. LC said Cats Protection in Glasgow used a Pets at Home vet.

Action: Secretary (LA) to draft letter to pet retailers, listing CPGAW members and enquiring about training, standards and cascading down of best practice

5. Cross Party Group events 13 – 15 May 2014

A briefing was circulated to members with details of the planned exhibition and members were asked to submit logos, messages and photographs to LA. CG notified the Group that she had secured a member’s debate for Motion S4M-09418 at lunchtime on Thursday 15 May. She hoped to persuade the First Minister to sign the Group’s Pledge for Scotland’s Animals and stage a photocall with group members and assistance dogs at around the same time. MSPs would also be able to sign the pledge and publicise this on social media.

6. Any other business

1) Subscriptions (£10 per organisation or individual) were now due and payable to the Secretary.

2) It was agreed that the next few meetings would look at equine issues, electric shock collars and snaring.