

All Party Group on Animal Welfare**October 2007****Attendees**

Claire Lawson	RSPCA
Tina Reece	RSPCA
Chief Inspector Lee Hopgood	RSPCA
Suzanne Campbell	POWA
John Campbell	POWA
Alain Thomas	GRW
Phil Jones	ILPH
Wendy Davies	BHS
Lionel Ford	Donkey Sanctuary
Ms A Ford	Donkey Sanctuary
Molly Lloyd	Donkey Sanctuary
Roy Peckham	Fforest Uchaf Pit Ponies
Sian Edwards	Dogs Trust
Molly Lloyd	The Donkey Sanctuary
Lorraine Barrett AM	Cardiff South and Penarth

Agenda

1. Chair's welcome and introduction.
2. Topic for discussion: Companion Animal Contingency Planning.
3. Discussion and Q&A.
4. Dates of future meetings.
5. Any other business.

Item 2: Companion Animal Contingency Planning**Lorraine Barrett****Lab, Cardiff South and Penarth**

- Opened the meeting and introduced Chief Inspector Lee Hopgood.

Lee Hopgood**Chief Inspector, RSPCA**

- Informed the group that his presentation would be about what happened during the summer floods in Gloucestershire and Worcestershire rather than general animal contingency planning.
- Stated that it was not until the third day of the floods that the RSPCA could begin to deal with animal rescues. This was because they had been drafted in to assist the fire brigade with human rescues.
- Acknowledged that the RSPCA had been criticised by sections of the animal welfare community for assisting the fire and rescue services rather than dealing exclusively with animal rescues. Responded to that criticism by saying that it was a matter of priorities and that human safety had to come before animal welfare.
- Stated that the RSPCA "essentially became part of the fire and rescue services" during the crisis.
- Noted that the most pet owners dealt effectively with their own problems.
- Applauded the "self-help" that went on within the farming community. Also said that the biggest problems occurred at small holdings and kennels, but once fresh water was dispatched these problems receded.
- Emphasised the importance of coordination between different government and non-governmental organisations when tackling similar crises.

Phil Jones**International League for the Protection of Horses**

- Asked what lessons had been learnt from the floods and what input the RSPCA would have in similar crises in the future.

Lee Hopgood**Chief Inspector, RSPCA**

- Replied that the RSPCA would have direct input into Defra's strategy in such situations.

Lorraine Barrett**Lab, Cardiff South and Penarth**

- Asked which Government agency would have responsibility for managing a similar crisis in Wales.

Lee Hopgood**Chief Inspector, RSPCA**

- Stated that the local authorities had primary responsibility for responding to major events such as floods.

Phil Jones**International League for the Protection of Horses**

- Asked how the lessons learnt from this summer's flooding would change future disaster responses.

Lee Hopgood**Chief Inspector, RSPCA**

- Suggested that it was likely that similar situations would arise again in the next 12 months and expressed the hope that better coordination between the rescue services would allow the RSPCA to concentrate on dealing with animal welfare issues.

Lorraine Barrett**Lab, Cardiff South and Penarth**

- Asked whether there was a role for animal organisations other than the RSPCA to assist in crises.

Lee Hopgood**Chief Inspector, RSPCA**

- Stated that there needs to be coherent leadership in the event of a crisis but acknowledged that it was likely that non-governmental organisations would continue to lead the animal welfare response.
- Stressed the importance of local animal forums being established within every local authority area.

Phil Jones**International League for the Protection of Horses**

- Asked to what extent the Government had listened to and acted upon RSPCA advice during the flooding.

Lee Hopgood**Chief Inspector, RSPCA**

- Replied that Government bodies did listen to the RSPCA, but added that the main lesson that he had learnt from the floods was that animal welfare will not be a Government priority in such situations and has to be dealt with by NGOs. Consequently, co-ordination between non-governmental organisations was of central importance.

Suzanne Campbell

Protect Our Wild Animals

- Asked what contingency plans for animal welfare had been put in place prior to the 2007 flooding.
- Expressed surprise that the authorities were not better prepared.

Lee Hopgood**Chief Inspector, RSPCA**

- Stated that for the first three days of the floods there was little consideration of animal issues beyond a DEFRA announcement that the welfare of farmed animals was the responsibility of farmers.

Wendy Davies**British Horse Society**

- Asked whether the RSPCA would be freer to deal with animal welfare issues when the next major crisis struck.

Lee Hopgood**Chief Inspector, RSPCA**

- Replied that the animal welfare response would depend on local capacity.

Wendy Davies**British Horse Society**

- Argued that it was unacceptable that the RSPCA was redeployed away from animal rescues.

Lee Hopgood**Chief Inspector, RSPCA**

- Acknowledged that it was disappointing that RSPCA could not focus on animal welfare, but added that if the fire and rescue services were overstretched then human rescues had to be the priority.

Lorraine Barrett**Lab, Cardiff South and Penarth**

- Suggested that the army should have been more involved in human rescue and therefore allowed the RSPCA to concentrate on animal welfare.

Claire Lawson**RSPCA**

- Stated that Defra was looking at the issue of animal welfare contingency planning.
- Noted that the Minister for Sustainability, Jane Davidson AM, was aware of the issue and had made reference to it in meetings.
- Confirmed that NGOs were willing to assist in any plan but stressed that efforts needed to be coordinated and planned effectively by the Government.
- Asked what contingency plans other NGOs had.

John Campbell**Protect Our Wild Animals**

- Stated that POWA had no specific contingency plans but that they were more than prepared to help in a crisis.
- Contended that it was time that a national water grid was established.

Wendy Davies**British Horse Society**

- Voiced her approval for the idea of setting up local animal welfare forums.

Lee Hopgood**Chief Inspector, RSPCA**

- Expressed concerns that many members of the public were unaware that the RSPCA is able to provide a rescue service in floods and other crises.
- Argued that if local animal welfare forums were to be effective they needed to be able to influence local and national decision makers.

Claire Lawson**RSPCA**

- Agreed that it was important that the local forums had influence.
- Argued that the Welsh animal forum should be established on an all-Wales basis.

Suzanne Campbell**Protect Our Wild Animals**

- Raised the issue of unlicensed puppy breeding and dog sales on farms with animal welfare problems.
- Raised a question regarding Farming Connect grants going to farmers for breeding dogs.

Claire Lawson**RSPCA**

- Warned that there were some myths about unlicensed breeding and that these stories were often without foundation, upon investigation – and referenced the relatively small number of prosecutions by local authorities and the RSPCA. There are indeed many problems with trace-ability, puppies coming from Ireland and even with breeding within the licensed sector.
- Criticised the myths being put about regarding Farming Connect grants, which was an issue a number of years ago and was dealt with by Lorraine and the Minister at the time. Stories surrounding this are raised again and again by people who do not understand the issue and the history. Indeed this may be as a result of some troublesome individuals or even dog magazines but it certainly does not help the campaign.
- Said that the RSPCA can only act when it receives complaints.