

Animal Welfare Charter Sub-Committee – 10 February 2004

Minutes of the meeting of the **Animal Welfare Charter Sub-Committee** held on **10 February 2004** when there were present:-

Cllr Mrs M J Webster (Chairman)

Cllr R A Amner
Cllr Mrs S A Harper

Cllr J M Pullen

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Mrs T J Capon.

OFFICERS PRESENT

G Woolhouse	- Head of Housing, Health and Community Care
J Ellis	- Environmental Protection Unit Manager
H Meggison	- Environmental Health Assistant
S Worthington	- Committee Administrator

ALSO PRESENT

B Elliott, Canon Hygiene
I Newby, Dangerous Wild Animal Rescue Facility, Great Wakering

15 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 1 December 2003 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

16 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr Mrs S A Harper declared a personal interest by virtue of being a member of the RSPB and EHPPS and of having made donations to IFAW, REDWINGS, AHT and ACT and of having subscribed to PETA.

Cllr Mrs M J Webster declared a personal interest by virtue of being a member of and either subscribing or donating to RSPB, RSPCA, PDSA, Blue Cross, IFAW, PETA, South East Essex Animal Welfare Organisation, Animal Aid, Hunt Saboteurs Association, League Against Cruel Sports, Cats Protection League, Cat Action Trust, Canine Defence League, National Trust, National Trust Rayleigh Mount Committee, Compassion in World Farming, Essex Wildlife Trust, Council for the Protection of Rural England, Council for the Protection of Rural Essex, Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace, Badger Protection Association, Fox Watch, Sir Francis of Assisi Group, The Cinnamon Trust, Donkey Trust, The Brook Animal Hospital, The Vegetarian Society, The Vegan Society, The Rescuers Wildlife Centre and organisations concerning dancing bears in Pakistan and concerning bears in China.

17 ANIMAL WELFARE CHARTER

The Chairman welcomed the Council's Environmental Protection Unit Manager and Mr B Elliott from the Council's contractor, Canon Hygiene, to the meeting.

It was noted that Canon Hygiene were called out to deal primarily with rats, house mice and squirrels; animals perceived by the public to be pests. The most common pest within the District was the brown rat. These come into contact with the general public when they migrate from fields. Rats require food, water and a home; they need water daily and can migrate into peoples' gardens, nest and colonise due to people providing them with a permanent food source by over-feeding birds there. Rats and squirrels can cause structural damage to a house and can chew through electrical cables.

During the period 1998 – 2002 there was a 29% increase in the rat population, which was primarily due to global warming, a reduction in sewer baiting, sewer disrepair, wild bird feeding and an increase in litter and fly tipping.

This Council provides a free rodent control service to residents in the District in order to ensure that only safe eradication methods are used. When a call is received about rat nuisance, a full risk assessment is conducted. Bait is put down for rats as a final resort; it is preferable to educate people, for example, to not overfeed birds in their garden, but to feed them little and often, and to then rat proof a property. It is only in instances when these measures fail that rat bait is put down. Rodents can breed every 21 days and can have litters of up to 13. It was important to try to control the rodent population in urban areas in order to control disease.

Rodenticides are ingested by rats via bait. Bromodiolone, a chronic poison, is most commonly used by the Council as it is slow acting and painless for the rat. It stops the rat's blood clotting and therefore causes it to bleed slowly over a period of time. The rat will become docile and eventually die in its sleep. Bait is put into a food source accessible to the rat and is palatable to it. There is, however, no guarantee that non target species will not take the bait. All baits have coloured dyes in them so that if, for example, a dog took the bait, the dye would show up when it was unwell, which would facilitate the giving of the appropriate antidote.

Responding to a Member enquiry relating to birth control, officers confirmed that there were no birth control pills for rodents.

In response to a further query about illnesses carried by rats, officers advised that rats carry leptospirosis, or Weil's disease, in their urine and that this can be contracted by people via contaminated water; rats also carry E.coli, salmonella and other potentially harmful organisms. It was, however, important to note that not all rats carry disease and that rats spend much time grooming themselves. It was very much a public perception that rats are a

menace, whereas squirrels are cute, despite the fact that squirrels can also be a nuisance.

Officers further advised that bait put down for rats would not be fatal to their predators, as it would be much diluted.

Responding to an additional query relating specifically to squirrels, officers confirmed that squirrels do not carry disease, but can cause structural damage to homes by moving into loft spaces and chewing through cabling, and also strip bark from trees in order to obtain sap.

It was noted that it was the role of the Local Authority to control the environment in such a way that food sources for rats are decreased, thereby reducing the need for frequent use of pesticides, which in turn helps to preserve their effectiveness. An urban area becomes undesirable when infested with rats, which will inhibit investment in that area.

The Council controls the environment by ensuring an effective waste collection and litter picking service, targeting vulnerable areas. Legislation enables the Council to take action in cases where private properties are causing a pest nuisance. In the case of an overgrown garden, for example, the Council can serve a private property owner with a notice requiring that the garden be cleared and that bait is placed. The Council controls the disposal of food waste under the Food Safety Act and further controls filthy and verminous premises under the Public Health Act.

The Council's main priority is to identify the source of any pest nuisance and to remove that source.

Officers felt that there was a need to improve liaison with the Water Authority to ensure that the Council's baiting programmes were properly co-ordinated with those of the water companies.

In response to a Member enquiry relating to takeaway food being discarded in public places, officers advised that the Environmental Protection Unit liaised closely with the litter picking team to ensure that appropriate areas were targeted.

Responding to a further query relating to bees' nests, officers confirmed that pesticides would only be used in instances that posed a serious health and safety issue, for example, a bees' nest in a school playground. Beekeepers could, however, be contacted and would remove a bees' nest free of charge, only charging their petrol costs. The Council has a contact list of beekeepers in the district, which is available to members of the public.

Officers advised that wasps can cause structural damage in a loft, as they are capable of chewing through cornices in ceilings and through wires. However, the wasp population has been dramatically reduced during the past few summers. If a resident wished the Council to remove a wasps' nest, a risk

assessment would be conducted and the nest would be removed with a safe pesticide. 70% of the nest would be destroyed, the remaining 30% of wasps would migrate to build a new nest elsewhere. Nests would not be treated in rainy conditions as the chalk powder used could escape and contaminate water sources for other creatures.

Officers confirmed that there were currently no instances of cockroach nuisance within the district and that these tended to favour inner city locations. They did, however, receive calls from the public relating to ant infestations. Ants were particularly destructive in that they burrow down and chew through the foundations of a building and then work their way back up through the floors, emerging through air pockets. The only way to deal with them is to use a growth repellent in a boric acid form. It was important for residents to seek expert advice on how to deal with ants, as proprietary ant killers on sale in the shops do not work.

Concluding the discussion, there was a general consensus that a periodic feature should be included in *Rochford District Matters* advising residents of ways to reduce instances of pest nuisance and reminding them of the importance of contacting the Council rather than attempting to deal with pests themselves.

Resolved

That a regular article should be included in *Rochford District Matters* offering advice to residents on pest nuisance. (HHHCC)

The Chairman welcomed Mr Iain Newby from the Dangerous Wild Animal Rescue Facility (DWARF), to the meeting.

It was noted that DWARF had been in existence for 6 years and had started by Mr Newby rescuing an alligator and obtaining a proper licence for it. DWARF helps the RSPCA and other animal groups and the police in rescuing dangerous wild animals, for which there would otherwise be no sanctuary. The majority of calls to the centre come from the RSPCA as the RSPCA is not properly insured to deal with such dangerous wild animals. The shelter currently receives around 20 calls per day about dangerous wild animals. The animals at DWARF were predominantly strays or victims of ill treatment or had simply been abandoned and left in public places. DWARF currently housed approximately 400 animals, most of which were reptiles or amphibians. Marks and Spencer donate a lot of food that would otherwise be thrown away to DWARF.

It was usual for the facility to take in adult iguanas and pythons that had been bought young but had subsequently grown to a very large size to the extent that the owners did not have appropriate room for them.

Mr Newby felt that, given the large number of snakes in this country, it should be compulsory for owners to buy an affordable annual licence for all big

snakes in excess of 8 feet, similar to the dog licence in that expensive insurance would not be required. This would enable the Local Authority to compile a register of all such licensed snakes within its district and to send out care sheets each year with the licence to owners. There were instances of large snakes being sold to under-age children, and furthermore a licence was not currently required, for example, for a Burmese python of over 22 feet, weighing 18 stone, which could easily consume a 16-year-old child.

Mr Newby believed that there was a loophole in legislation in that shops do not have to see a dangerous wild animal licence before selling, for example, a Cayman alligator. Shops do not have to list all dangerous wild animals going in and out, as part of licensing arrangements, although DWARF, as part of its licensing, has to list all animals housed there. The Sub-Committee concurred that there would be merit in recommending to other Local Authorities and to local MPs that legislation should be changed requiring pet shops to see dangerous wild animal licences prior to selling such animals and further requiring pet shops to list all such animals bought and sold.

Only one of the Cayman alligators that have been homed at DWARF had been previously licensed, all the others were unlicensed. It was further noted that there was a marked increase in wildlife crime as a result of the large profits involved.

It was the general consensus of the Sub-Committee that any move to reduce the number of licensed dangerous wild animals should be discouraged and that the licensing of all snakes over 8 feet long should be recommended to other Local Authorities and local MPs.

Mr Newby was in the process of developing a DWARF website that would include care sheets for every creature homed at the shelter. Mr Newby believed that Cayman alligators should not be imported into this country. Cayman alligators have a longevity of approximately 80 years and can grow to a length of around 18 feet. They are not pets.

During discussions there was a general consensus that there should be experts at import locations in this country to verify that the dangerous wild animals being imported matched the corresponding import documentation for the animals.

It was noted that there were instances of snapping turtles, alligator snappers terrapins and bullfrogs being left in public ponds when owners were unable to cope with them. The Sub-Committee believed that there would be merit in the Council's Woodlands and Environmental Specialist liaising with Mr Newby about checking ponds in the district's open areas to confirm whether or not they contained any such amphibians. Mr Newby had details of a scheme whereby for a cost of £25 terrapins and alligator snappers could be sent to Spain to be reintroduced to a controlled environment.

Resolved

That the Woodlands and Environmental Specialist liaise with Mr Newby with respect to checking the District Council's ponds for any non-indigenous species.

And further **Recommended**

That any move to reduce the number of licensed dangerous wild animals should be discouraged and that the licensing of all snakes over 8 feet long should be recommended to other Local Authorities and local MPs.

That it be recommended to other Local Authorities and local MPs that legislation should be changed requiring pet shops to see dangerous wild animal licences prior to selling such animals and further requiring pet shops to list all such animals bought and sold. (HHHCC)

The meeting commenced at 10.00 am and closed at 12.37 pm.

Chairman

Date