

Animal Welfare Charter Sub-Committee – 29 September 2003

Minutes of the meeting of the **Animal Welfare Charter Sub-Committee** held on **29 September 2003** when there were present:-

Cllr Mrs M J Webster (Chairman)

Cllr Mrs T J Capon
Cllr Mrs S A Harper

Cllr J R F Mason
Cllr J M Pullen

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr R A Amner

OFFICERS PRESENT

G Woolhouse - Head of Housing, Health and Community Care
H Meggison - Environmental Health Assistant
M Martin - Committee Administrator

ALSO ATTENDING

Sgt P Saunders - Essex Police
Mr J Maerz - Essex Trading Standards
Mr P Woodford - representing the local farming community/National Farmers' Union

3 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllrs Mrs M J Webster and Mrs S A Harper agreed that they would supply separately a list of declarations of interest in respect of this Sub-Committee.

4 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 28 July 2003 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Matters Arising

Members of the Sub-Committee noted that Mr Newby would be happy to receive them on a visit to the local exotics rescue centre.

5 ANIMAL WELFARE CHARTER

The Chairman welcomed the representatives from the National Farmers' Union, Essex Police and Essex Trading Standards to the meeting.

Essex Trading Standards

Mr Maerz informed Members that their responsibilities included the following:-

- The welfare of animals in transit and at markets (5 inspectors are available to work on animal health cover across Essex).
- Undertaking visits to farms and markets to educate and advise.
- Maintaining records so that animals can be traced in the event of an outbreak of disease.
- Providing notice to local authorities of all movements.
- Maintaining a database funded by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA)/Memorandum of Understanding.
- Visits to and inspection of farms.
- Checking that livestock are healthy and disease free.
- Statutory responsibility for animal health and welfare since 1974.
- Regular inspection visits to Essex ports to check on the import and export of livestock.
- Regular visits to the dedicated live slaughter market at Colchester, to check for cleanliness and animal welfare.
- Where incidents of cruelty are suspected, veterinary inspectors from DEFRA will investigate and, in exceptional circumstances, prosecute.
- Working in line with legislation (copy of which is attached to Minutes).

In response to Member questions, the following was noted in respect of Trading Standards:-

- Their jurisdiction ends at the port; they work with the state veterinary services to ensure that animals are fit to travel and that vehicles used were suitable providing sufficient ventilation and easy access to animals.
- Specified crate sizes exist for transporting poultry; legs and head should not stick out.
- Veterinary surgeons are often in attendance at abattoirs to monitor numbers of dead on arrival; these statistics would be provided for Members.
- New farming methods have resulted in poultry being loaded into crates by 'coaxing' methods; thus avoiding manhandling.
- They work in partnership with customs over issues such as rabies.
- Animals such as exotic birds, lizards etc should come into the country under licence.
- They would work with DEFRA and customs if no licence existed.
- Roadside checks of livestock in transit take place to check for overcrowding, but vehicle speed is an issue for the police.
- The Welfare of Animals in Transit Order 1997 provides regulations for the the protection of animals during transport.
- The County Council had not produced an Animal Welfare Charter.

Essex Police

Sergeant Saunders outlined their responsibilities for animal welfare which included the following:-

- In response to legislation, wildlife liaison officers were appointed in 1981.

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- These are appointed by each sub-division, which totals around 22/23 across the county.
- These officers have to perform the task in addition to other duties.
- One dedicated part time officer works at the Chelmsford Headquarters.
- One individual per sub-division does not have the time to progress the work adequately.
- Prior to this animal issues were referred to other statutory bodies such as the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA).
- They are not experts; their role is to link up with other agencies involved with wildlife crime to advise, assist or to take the lead, as appropriate.
- They are able to assist charities such as the RSPCA or Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) who can provide the expertise, but rely on the police to enforce the law.
- Wildlife crime is the second largest global crime in terms of figures, but is not currently a 'recordable' crime and therefore does not show up on police planning.
- The Rayleigh division is very supportive of the role.

In response to Member questions, the following was noted in respect of Essex Police:-

- Their work around animal welfare is mainly centred around wildlife crime but does include domestic issues from time to time.
- Sergeant Saunders agreed to supply Members with the job description for a liaison officer, together with any other relevant information, in order that the Sub-Committee could make representations to Essex Police about the need to supply adequate manpower to this role.
- An example to be cited would be that of the disappearance of hares following the arrival of travellers on a site within the Basildon area and the time taken by the Police to respond.
- Officers agreed to write to the Home Office requesting that wildlife crime be established as 'recordable'.
- The Crown Prosecution Service is able to help, although frequently a lack of expertise makes it difficult for them to give adequate advice to solicitors
- The National Wildlife Crime Intelligence Unit helps in the fight against wildlife crime by providing law enforcement to target and disrupt these crimes and the major criminals involved.
- The section also coordinates the activity of relevant agencies and non-governmental organisations, such as HM Customs and Excise, the RSPB, the RSPCA and the World Wildlife Fund.
- It was important to ensure that the safe surroundings exist in the Cherry Orchard Jubilee Country Park for wildlife.
- Legal guidelines exist for the setting of snares.
- The Partnership for Action Against Wildlife Crime (PAW) is a multi-agency body comprising representatives of all the organisations involved in wildlife law enforcement in the UK.
- A DEFRA national directory on wildlife crime existed (Sgt Saunders agreed to pass this information to officers).

- A veterinary surgeon needs to be consulted from the outset where a crime has been committed, otherwise it is difficult to prosecute and DEFRA may call in their own, if appropriate.

National Farmers' Union

Mr Woodford outlined the way in which animal welfare is monitored on farms, as follows:-

- This is a very regulated industry; the state veterinary surgeon and DEFRA can visit a farm at any time.
- Inspectors check on the general welfare and living conditions of animals.
- Farms are audited every year on animal movements.
- Checks are made to ensure that medication is being dispensed properly and that out of date stocks are not being used.

In response to Member questions, Mr Woodford confirmed that:-

- There is no market in this county for young lambs.
- Since the last outbreak of foot and mouth disease in this country, young animals have to be at least 6 days old before they can be sent away.
- Livestock farmers rely on exports in order to get better prices, but it would be beneficial if the same legislation on the transportation of livestock existed for all Members of the European Economic Community.
- Meat, not produced, but processed in this country can carry the British flag.
- New regulations for looking after hedgerows now existed, but that in order to try and prevent Dutch Elm disease from spreading, elm hedges needed to be kept down.
- Grants were becoming available for hedge planting.
- An Essex animal welfare liaison group meets 6 monthly with the livestock market and other bodies and is often led by DEFRA.
- 90% of farming in the District is arable.

Emergency Planning

Members noted that in the course of preparation of the Charter, discussions around the movement /protection of animals in the event of an emergency would need to take place. This would involve the District's Emergency Planning Officer.

Crime

Members noted that the following instances of animal crime occurred from time to time within this District and could be addressed by the Charter:-

- bird smuggling
- conduct connected with night fishing
- fish smuggling in connection with fishing syndicates which could lead to the spread of disease; DEFRA could discredit affected lakes
- poaching of venison and deer, for example

- illegal meat trade
- live trapping of foxes/badgers.

Animal Welfare Education

Examples of what is currently taking place include:-

- articles appear from time to time in Rochford District Matters
- teaching in schools
- Police open days (less frequently of late, due to lack of resources)
- school visits to farms

Fireworks

The Charter needs to address the issue of fireworks. Members noted that new legislation will introduce a ban on fireworks above a certain number of decibels, although these can still be included in selection packs over the value of £10. The aim is to deter youths from purchasing single noisy fireworks. The Fireworks Act 2003 will be enforced next year. The Police can deal with problem incidents that take place in the street.

Bats

The Charter should include information relating to bats.

The Trading Standards representative agreed to liaise with officers over the wording. An article could also be placed in Rochford District Matters.

The Police representative confirmed that he would liaise with officers over the name of the County's field worker.

Other issues

Members recognised that the Charter would provide an opportunity to strengthen previous decisions taken by the Council on the animal welfare issues relating to, for example, circuses and fox-hunting.

Officer representatives to be invited to next meeting

Members agreed that representatives from the woodlands, emergency planning and housing sections should be invited to the next meeting of this Sub-Committee to provide expertise from their particular areas of work which would be relevant to the preparation of the Charter.

Consultation

The RSPCA should be included in the list of consultees for the draft version of the Charter. Public consultation could be conducted via the Joint Consultation Forum now being established for Rochford and Castle Point.

Visit to local exotics rescue centre

Officers agreed to try and arrange two opportunities for Members to visit the centre on Monday 20th October (am) and on Saturday 8th November (am).

6 DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

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Members agreed that the next meeting of the Sub-Committee be held on Monday 10 November, commencing at 10 am in the Civic Suite, Rayleigh.

The meeting closed at 12.35 pm

Chairman

Date