



DOGS IN SOCIETY CONFERENCE 2015

NB: Please note that this is a light overview of and actions from the day and not verbatim minutes. The presentations given on the day can be seen at the APGAW website¹.

Opened by **Henry Smith MP, Co-Chairman for APGAW**

Session 1 Update on APGAW Dog Strategy: Angela Smith MP

The APGAW Sub-Group for Dogs published its Dog Strategy² in January 2015 and some progress has been made with the seven prioritised recommendations within that report:

1. **Recommendation 3:** Work is taking place with the Animal Behaviour and Training Council to ensure there is an industry standard for behaviourists and trainers however this is progressing very slowly. Concerns have been raised around the cost of certified clinical behaviourists being prohibitive for individuals and the public sector. More work is needed in this area and the Canine & Feline Sector Group are looking at this.
2. **Recommendation 4:** Unfortunately there is no update on developments regarding the encouragement of using independent behaviourists to investigate all serious and fatal dog bite incidents.
3. **Recommendation 6:** Progress is being made, more work is to be done. Guidance for such bodies has been updated and republished by the RSPCA. There is a manual to explain what this means in practice. Seminars were piloted this year and will be continued. Whilst this takes time, there is action being taken.
4. **Recommendation 7:** In recent months, the Minister has indicated that he intends to carry out a public consultation at the end of December and start the process of the necessary improvements that are needed around licensing of breeders and petshops. It is a very important issue for many, whether the focus is on backstreet breeding, internet selling, puppy farms or international trade. Keep up the pressure because we need to take this opportunity.
5. **Recommendation 13:** This document acts as a warranty for puppies sold. The Kennel Club have received it but they are still to sign it off despite this taking a significant amount of time.

¹ www.apgaw.org (accessed 30.11.15)

² <http://www.apgaw.org/Default.aspx?pageid=42> (accessed 30.11.15)

6. **Recommendation 18:** The Codes of Practice under the Animal Welfare Act (in this case on dogs) are to be updated. The review has now taken place and the submission provided a number of suggestions including more information around behaviour and socialisation. Defra is considering this and an announcement is hoped for early next year.
7. **Recommendation 21:** This identifies the need for adequate resources for dog-related problems. No new legislation is worth the paper it is written on unless it can be enforced. The delivery and adequate resources to do the job are vital. Some progress has been made but there is still more to do.

Angela then went on to discuss a number of key themes coming out of the Dog Strategy that she felt were important both for politicians and decision makers as well as those interested in dog-related issues. In many respects these became key themes for the day overall.

- **Consensus**

If we are going to focus on the need to establish the resources, we need to ensure there is a consensus (from the animal welfare world) about the right way forward. It is very difficult to make decisions without a consensus. After all, if you can't agree on something then why should decision makers take action. The Dog Strategy itself has brought organisations together. We hope that you can reach a similar consensus on the key issues.

- **Evidence**

Evidence is also key to win the arguments and in order for policy decisions to be made. Evidence. Whilst it is accepted that getting an evidence base is not easy, we have some information on imports of dogs into the UK and the new PDSA PAW report also gives useful insights. Once there is a better understanding of the problems and how they all interact we can better come up with solutions. There is also independent academic research on local authority enforcement. Evidence and consensus is needed in order to obtain resources.

- **Resources**

The debate is about all of our limited resources and how can they be best be used. Do we need to reconsider what we think can be done? In an ideal world we would have the resources but in reality we don't. We can't necessarily look to government to provide the resources. Possible solutions:

- Pet food levy
- Pet licensing system

The knowledge and skills drain goes with the current resources. What support can charities give to each other in order to give the skill sets they need. Licensing can work in other countries – why can't we do it here? Funding needs to be sustainable and fair as we can all see where resources dry up when the economy hits a bad patch.

A number of questions were then asked by the audience of the politicians focusing on a range of issues:

- The Kennel Club stated that the Puppy Contract had been signed off by them but delays in getting to this were due to other organisations and not just them.
- The Dogs Trust asked a question about funding for resources and whether the money could be ring-fenced. The politicians agreed this was a key point and a real challenge but that if it could be done then there could be benefits to society as a whole.
- The National Animal Welfare Trust asked about whether any thoughts have been given to identifying other schemes for recognising behaviourists/trainers other than the ABTC. The politicians said that what was necessary was to have a scheme and standard that works and improves current standards - it must be clearly recognised and understood.
- PupAid stated they felt that consensus was key and should be a theme carried forward.

- The Pet Industry Federation stated they supported the responsible sale of puppies in pet shops but not puppy farming. They felt the focus should be on how the animal is sold and not where it is sold from.
- The Karlton Index asked whether the hard evidence was going to come from that the politicians required. The politicians stated there is some out there already, for example from Battersea Dogs & Cats Home report as well as others. The key was that any information could be substantiated.

Session 2 Keynote Speakers: George Eustice MP (Minister of State for Defra, Animal Welfare), Kerry McCarthy MP (Shadow Secretary of State for Defra), and Baroness Parminter (Liberal Democrat Spokesperson for Defra issues)

All three were pleased that APGAW had not only developed such a strategy for dogs but also was holding an annual conference to monitor developments and identify trends and needs for new activities/issues.

The Minister then gave an overview of the issues and measures that the then Government had addressed in the last Parliament, e.g. compulsory microchipping (due to come into force in April next year) as well as new legislation (and sentencing) with regard to dog control (which is already in force). He also stated that the Government was closely looking at the issue of importation of puppies and with recent changes to the PETS scheme he hoped there would be improvements but recognised that concerns remain with this and wider breeding and trading of dogs. The Minister also pointed out that the Government had issued guidance to local authorities clarifying the situation with regard to which breeding establishments to license.

The Minister then stated the Government's plans for this Parliament and these are to consult on the review and development of new proposals for licensing animal establishments under the Animal Welfare Act. The idea being to provide a general licence that could be tailored to suit the specific animal establishment concerned. He indicated that if an establishment was part of a recognised accredited scheme then they may not need a licence from the local authority. Finally he stated that the Government was keen to address the issue of aversive training devices, e.g. electronic training devices and prong collars, etc under the revised Dog Welfare Code of Practice.

The Shadow Secretary of State also stated that she felt there had been some very positive cross-party support on these issues, for example on dog control and hoped that it would continue going forward. She recognised a great deal of the current legislation is very out of date and so the review is very timely. However she remained concerned about how any new laws would be enforced with the lack of resources for this. She indicated her interest in greyhound welfare, dog breeding, dealing and trade as well as microchipping. She noted that many of these issues are extremely important to the public and so politicians should take note.

The Shadow Secretary of State was keen to remind people of issues outside of the UK and her concerns about the dog-meat trade. She urged the Minister to raise the UK's concerns with colleagues from the Foreign Office so this could be taken up.

The Spokesperson for the Liberal Democrats emphasised the need for securing consensus across the animal welfare world and recognising in some areas some organisations will need to compromise but it is important the sector comes to together and works together on these issues. She stated that the Liberal Democrats have prioritised the breeding and sale of dogs as an issue they will take forward and they would be working with

the different organisations and Government on this. In particular they would press hard on reducing the number of litters from five to three and also look at what more could be done with regard to internet sales.

A number of questions were then asked by the audience of the politicians focusing on a range of issues:

- Professor Sheila Crispin asked the Minister about the Deregulation Bill and whether records would still need to be kept for breeding establishments. The Minister asked her to write to him about this.
- Vets Get Scanning asked about whether it could not only be compulsory to microchip but also compulsory to scan for a microchip. The Minister felt the current Regulations were sufficient.
- Anne McBride raised concerns about accreditation schemes and the need to for acceptable standards that are properly inspected at an acceptable level. The Minister indicated he felt UKAS accredited schemes were acceptable however was happy to receive different views in the consultation.
- The PDSA asked about the real problem of educating the public about dog welfare issues and the lack of any presence of this in the National Curriculum. The Minister acknowledged the work of many of the charities with regard to education but did not feel the National Curriculum was necessarily the correct place.

Session 3 Dogs and Society - Are We Still A Nation Of Dog Lovers? Dr John Bradshaw BA (Oxon) PhD (Soton) (Bristol University), Dr Sandra McCune (Mars)

Dr Bradshaw opened this session by giving an overview of the changes in the last fifty years with regard to our attitudes to dog ownership. He noted that we keep more dogs than we did then and there has been a big increase in the number of pedigree dogs being kept. The culture of dog keeping has changed significantly, for example more dogs are left home alone for long periods, some see them as disposable items, how we feed dogs has changed and veterinary medicines and treatments have improved significantly. It has even changed in that the role of dogs has changed with dogs being used as assistance animals. Our relationship with dogs has changed significantly, however the mass media has impacted on this both for the good and worse.

We do anthropomorphise dogs, e.g. dressing them up, objectifying them and looking at their cuteness. In particular with brachycephalic dogs which can lead to health problems for these animals. Peter Sandoe (BVA, 2015) looked at this issue and found that with such dogs there was greater owner attachment (higher than average), with many feeling the breathlessness was 'cute'. Despite knowing such dogs were unhealthy there were repeat owners who obtained more of the same breed. So while it is good in many respects that many feel dogs as part of their family there is a downside to this.

He noted that the dog behaviour and training community is extremely divided and there is a real need to resolve this. Despite greater understanding of how dogs learn and the correct methods to be used to train and/or address behavioural issues the public as a whole is quite slow to adapt to the new methods. This may be largely due to the celebrity 'trainers' suggesting quick fixes through old-fashioned methods.

He finished his presentation asking the question about whether the Animal Welfare Act 2006 adequately protects against mental suffering. The five freedoms are clear and provide for a freedom 'from fear and distress' yet the five welfare needs are not as explicit. Is that right? We know dogs can suffer mentally and it is important that suffering can be addressed and better still prevented. There does appear to be a gap between owners' knowledge in this area and the legal requirements. People understand where they should

go when their pet has a physical problem but not when it has behavioural ones. Do we need the ABTC and the veterinary profession to come together to try and address this?

Dr McCune then looked at this topic and highlighted some of the work that her company has conducted looking at the positive benefits of dogs in society. Society as a whole has many thousands of years of association with dogs and this has evolved over that time into our relationship we have today. For example, a staggering statistic from the US suggests that children are more likely to grow up with a pet rather than their father.

There are a number of studies showing the health benefits of having a pet, for example:

- for children, they can reduce the number of sick days from school, reduce the number of allergies and asthma, increase empathy
- for older adults, they can reduce loneliness, depression and blood pressure, increase physical activity and socialisation.
- could save the NHS £3 billion pa (Mills, 2013)

Such studies are improving over time and the quality and complexity is increasing.

More information about this work can be found on the Waltham website³.

Session 4 Legal Beagles - What Laws Are Needed To Protect People & Dogs? How Can They Be Enforced Effectively? Mike Radford OBE (Aberdeen University), Rob Quest (City of London Corporation)

Mike Radford opened this session by stating there is a real need to review, update and consolidate dog-related law. Such legislation dates back to 1835 and is largely built up over the years on an ad hoc basis. This has led to confusion amongst the public and in some cases enforcement bodies. There is no real strategic approach to this area of law.

To try and rectify this there is a need to go back to first principles. Is the keeping of dogs a private or public issue? If the former then a voluntary approach is needed with education, but if the latter then we need state intervention. However if the state becomes involved should it only target necessary groups who are not meeting the needs of their pets? What about the rest of the population?

We should not forget that in law dogs are classed as property and therefore in the absence of any law preventing it, private individuals can treat them in whatever way they wish. We therefore need state intervention to prevent owners from treating their dogs badly.

However, are we seeing a 'privatisation of policy making' with an increase in advisory groups, for example the CFSG influencing Government in this area? Is this a good thing or bad? Additionally self-regulation can be difficult as it is not accountable or transparent in the way state regulation is.

³ www.waltham.com (accessed 30.11.15)

Breeding and supply is a crucial issue to address as many puppies are being irresponsibly bred and sold. Many with long-term health and welfare problems. However this is extremely difficult to deal with due to the lack of traceability and accountability. It is extremely difficult to hold those responsible to account.

There are a number of questions we need to address to resolve these problems:

- What is dog ownership? Is it a right? A public good?
- Is it too easy to get a dog? Are the rehoming organisations' messaging right? Promote responsible dog ownership but should they be more honest?
- Do owners understand their responsibilities and their need to be accountable?
- Enforcement - just who is responsible? the Animal Welfare Act is a discretionary piece of legislation for local authorities meaning many simply do not use it.
- Should the RSPCA have statutory powers and the inspectorate be seen as a public body for these purposes to secure more transparent and consistent enforcement of the law?
- What do we mean by enforcement? Is it retrospective (e.g. section 4 and 8 of the Animal Welfare Act)? Prospective (e.g. section 9 of the Animal Welfare Act)? Self vs state regulation? Should it focus on the person or the dog?

Rob Quest then gave a presentation about his work at the City of London tackling the problem of illegal imports of puppies. The impact this has on animal health and welfare and some of the challenges facing enforcers today.

Session 5 Discussion with Panel & Floor: Expert Panel (chaired by Peter Egan), David Bowles (CFSG/Puppy Board), Mark Berry (NCAFG), Dr John Bradshaw BA (Oxon) PhD (Soton) (Bristol University), Mike Radford OBE (Aberdeen University), Rob Quest (City of London Corporation), Patricia Colville BVMS MRCVS (President BSAVA)

The panel considered the question of what the main challenges were with dogs. They agreed that 2016 provided the ideal opportunity with the Government consultation on pet vending to get real progress on this issue and change laws for the first time in 65 years. However there will need to be better analysis of the issues, for example what the problems actually are, their scale and potential solutions. There is no clear understanding of the dog population or the origins of or how many puppies come on to the market each year. There needs to be greater cooperation to ensure all participants want to achieve the same thing, i.e. better dog and puppy health and welfare.

In answer to the question about resources the panel all agreed that these would be tight particularly in light of the agreement that day to cut 15% from Defra budgets and 30% from DCLG budgets. In addition, David Bowles pointed out that charity budgets would be squeezed with the changes in fundraising to be announced in 2016. To counter this there needs to be more and better multi-agency work and an acceptance that the State cannot simply expect the charity sector to fill in the gaps.

Closed by **Rebecca Pow MP, Co-Chairman for APGAW**

Rebecca thanked everyone for coming and having a constructive meeting and stated that she and the other Officers will ensure that APGAW takes forward the conclusions and actions from the meeting into 2016 and will hold a further meeting to assess progress on a date to be arranged.

The main areas identified to focus on and take forward were:

- 1. Securing buy-in and consensus amongst the key stakeholders as to the best way forward to achieve improvements to dog health and welfare.**
- 2. Finding an effective and sustainable model for a funding stream to ensure there are resources for enforcement and education.**
- 3. Identifying an effective model and securing agreement within the behaviour and training community so that all could access quality information and advice.**