The Associate Parliamentary Group for Animal Welfare

An all party group for members of both houses at Westminster formed to promote and further the cause of animal welfare by all means available to the Parliaments at Westminster and in Europe

MINUTES OF THE MEETING ON 11th December 2012
Update on Dog Control, Breeding and Welfare

Political Members: Lord Soulsby, Lord Gale, Geoffrey Clifton-Brown MP, Neil Parish MP, Lord Sandy Trees, Simon Hart MP, Huw Irranca Davies MP,

Neil Parish MP - We have had the EFRA select committee which took place this Autumn with a report to be published in early 2013. We also know the Home Office are looking at legislation for greater control on dangerous dogs within private property. The debate over welfare and control has been on-going for some time and many of the people here this evening have been involved in previous meetings on the topic. During this evening's meeting we want to see where we have got to and what needs to be done next, to find areas of agreement to move forward on and ensure we are a working together.

James Yeates (RSPCA) – Thank you APGAW **f**or helping to keep this important issue of dog breeding and welfare live. It has been a few years now and it could have dropped off people's agendas. It is helpful to keep this issue high profile. It is always relevant to consider how important dogs are to our civilization and the strong links between humans and animals. Uses of dogs in society primarily began as tools for competition, or business and now they are primarily companions which makes a difference and has impacted on breed standards and practice. Luckily in dog breeding we have noticed the problems caused by bad breeding practice and have moved on from it being seen as a scandal to an actual welfare issue which we want to understand and tackle.

There are some ways of tackling this and irresponsible ownership immediately. Micro-chipping is a no brainer, it is not a panacea but it does provide that important traceability which is important for accountability. To work it must be updated and the microchip must not be a random number. It can assist in coping with issues of stray dogs and status dogs and falling in with spending reviews if we have a registration system as the RSPCA has worked out that only £17 would cover the local authority cost in administrating this. This also gives us something to attach things like licensing too.

On the debate on dangerous dogs private property it remains a contentious issue. The RSPCA believe dog control notices should be utilized to improve welfare problems before incidents occur.

Paula Boyden (Dog's Trust) – If we are bringing in legislation we should not take a blanket approach to penalize all dogs and people for what is a minority causing problems. Therefore, micro-chipping is a no brainer as whilst it will not solve all problems and there is some validity to the negative comments like what is the point as those with dogs causing problems won't get them micro-chipped, it would at least be a lever for us to take action against these individuals. Dog Control Notices again seem relatively sensible and are already present in Scotland. Again this acts as a lever to get tangible action to seek to get compliance to behave appropriately with a dog. Private property is a hot issue and difficult to tackle but with 6,000 postal workers every year being bitten there has to be some sort of recourse. During the EFRA Enquiry we set out that we would like to see Section 1 repealed which would be quite challenging but at the very least Section 1 dogs should be allowed on bail so they are not locked up for weeks or months until the case has been resolved.

Returning to micro-chipping, the puppy should be registered before first change of ownership and this will help us deal with irresponsible breeding practice. Additionally, addressing the Illegal import of puppies might be helped by micro-

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chipping before the puppy leaves the breeder. Almost daily we hear of litters of puppies brought over the channel in poor health and bad conditions. On the sale of puppies, most welfare organisations are members of PAAG, the Pet Advertising Advisory Group which looks to get framework of sale on-line as that is a growing market. The sale of puppies online is not an illegal act so if we work with the organisations like GumTree selling puppies online we can at least try to get decent standards.

With inherited defects we do not have prevalence data fully formed yet and we need that so I endorse Vet Compass and other collections of data from vets practice. This will give us an idea of which ones we should tackle first.

We need a modern framework around legislation on the breeding of puppies. Everyone should be registered or at least anyone breeding 2 litters plus should registered with the local authority. We have the puppy contract and it is good as it starts to address the behaviour of puppies too. The biggest reason for dogs being euthanized is behaviour. They must be socialised so welfare organisations do not see the results of it and this should form part of the buyer process.

Neil Parish MP– I took part in a Radio 5 Live report yesterday on puppies coming in from the Republic of Ireland illegally. They are advertised online and sold out of the back of vans. We must know where the puppy has come from, there needs to be a focus on seeing the dam.

Steve Dean (Kennel Club) - I agree with much of Paula's statement. Micro-chipping is a no brainer. Dog biting is an owner problem, indeed a behavioural problem often caused by lack of owner socialization. The KC is keen on the concept of deed not breed with legislation that allows us to deal with the incidents not individual breeds of dogs. Furthermore, we need to differentiate between different breeders as we tend to talk as if they are a mass but they are not. For example there are KC registered specific breeders, then there are puppy farm breeders not generally registered with us as we now demand to see Local Authority registration. The real welfare issues largely come from those outside of those under the influence of KC. We have the problem that if we make it too difficult we will push the buyer into the hands of those bad breeders.

Certainly we see our Assured Breeder's Scheme as a model and we will continue to work on that. It is giving us some of the prevalence data albeit for a small number of breeders. On gene pools we have been aware of this and great efforts in working to make sure gene pools are as wide as possible takes place. However, genetic science is a relatively new science and we are still learning to use it. There are growing numbers of tests available for the more simple problems but in other areas genetics are still being worked on. We are learning as we go along with the geneticists and we need to be careful we don't make assumptions without the science behind it. We put a tool on the KC website to allow breeders to calculate but this cannot be a simple measure with which to judge the health of dogs. Using various tests including gene texts we can reduce risks of ill health.

What came out of EFRA Enquiry was the worrying lack of differentiation and a focus on generic solutions. There were frequent calls for another review of breed standards which will only influence those breeders who show their dogs and no puppy farmer will bother reading them. The show-ring should be a beacon of excellence and we commit to this. More importantly to improving welfare we need to get an understanding of this differentiation so we can create an environment where the micro-chip can be used as a core tool which increasingly alienates the puppy farmer type of breeder so the public comes to understand where they can go to buy a health puppy. By working together we can do this. Where we have come together, and micro-chipping is an example, we have seen progress.

Robin Hargreaves (British Veterinary Association) - I won't go over what James and Paula went over as it was a comprehensive overview of where the problems lie. I got the portfolio for this after the EFRA Enquiry but have read the transcripts. I am pleased about Steve saying we must work together as we need to concentrate on the areas where we agree and can achieve progress. Everyone has their own perspectives and aims and the BVA are no different. I will outline what BVA would like to achieve; some are aspirational and some are achievable with co-operation and some are immensely doable now. We would like to see a broad review of the breeding legislation, we would like a welfare code or an update of the existing dog welfare code, we would like the Advisory Council to have more powers and to be properly resourced, to have compulsory micro-chipping and for help from Defra to control the sale of dogs over the internet.

We have the horrendous puppy farming examples where puppies are bred to fail and then we have wider than that industrial production of puppies which is not quite as heinous as puppy farming but with no care given to genetic improvement.

The most doable thing is empowering the purchaser rather than going to the back of the problem. Empower the purchaser and steer them towards the quality breeder. Mark Abraham's initiative about seeing the mother of the puppy is one simple solution. We need to get to people before they make the decision and give them something in their hand as a reminder of questions to ask and this comes down to an accepted Puppy Contract. I think the BVA AWF, RSPCA contract is wonderful and whilst the KC has issues with it, I do not believe they are insurmountable. We need to bridge that gap. A 50-year man like me has a health check as everybody in the health business told me it is good idea and nobody said a different thing. If people involved in dog breeding do the same and pick a collective theme like a puppy contract it becomes nature to use it. It should be available in vet's waiting rooms, in petshops, online etc.

I am a little concerned about the notion of a levy on registration as the microchip is an easy sale with universal benefits whereas licenses previously with fees only saw a 50% uptake. I favour the idea of a bail system for dogs impounded because we have seen and dealt with dogs impounded and they have been in kennels for 10 months so are unapproachable and unable to be handled.

The Assured Breeders Scheme does lots of admirable things but worryingly Lord De Mauley said at the EFRA Enquiry that he felt existing charities and organisations can improve welfare standards themselves with tools like this but the Assured Breeder's Scheme is a small select group. The only way of increasing uptake is to decrease stringent standards. If you make it harder people will drop out.

Neil Parish MP – I would like to turn to Professor Crispin now so ask what her thoughts are on the EFRA Enquiry and whether the Advisory Council needs to be given more teeth. Do you think it would be possible to become a regulatory authority?

Professor Crispin (Advisory Council on Dog Breeding) - I doubt we will become regulatory at any point but there is an argument to say we are necessary. Farm animal interests are much better looked after than companion animal interests in the UK and through legislation. There are now legal and illegal imports coming into the country, indeed 11 puppies came from Bulgaria which is a rabies country the day after the changes to restrictions. Rabies and other diseases can affect all animals. We need a robust body to look after the interests of companion animals and to prevent this kind of thing happening. Summarising what others have said, I hope we all agree that problems relating to dogs do arise from irresponsible breeding and selling with the people buying often being immensely stupid and keeping dogs with no knowledge of then, thinking they self train.

The Dangerous Dog Act has never been fit for purpose and the latest death cause by a Jack Russell proves it is deed not breed. Government must not be frightened to tackle this.

I would call it permanent identification rather than micro-chipping – better methods of identification may come along. This permanent identification is something will all agree on, it must identify who bred the dog and link them so it must take place before the puppy leaves breeder.

There may be no need for an annual review of breed standard but there still needs to be review. Steve and I have this argument as I feel the terminology is too opaque which does not help. On a more general level there should be breeding standards which apply to all dogs and we should be able to say this is how we should breed dogs with some basic standards to meet. Professor Bateson is about to chair a working party to look specifically at this breeding standard.

I am not going to say much on legislation. It is an obvious area to discuss but we know that Government does not have much appetite for primary legislation so we need to operate within the existing framework. Education of everybody is needed; by that I mean from some officials on the Defra side were not as well briefed as they should have been on dog issues right down to the little girl who wants a puppy for Christmas. Data collection is absolutely right and not just about health but also about what should be straightforward data such as how many dogs are in the UK right now. How

can we relate anything without this simple information? We are beginning to make real improvement here working with the Royal Veterinary College and I think now insurance groups are thinking sharing of data is a good idea.

Accurate terminology is important in relation to things like puppy farming – what on earth does that mean? You cannot farm puppies and kittens, the needs of those immature animals is not comparable with the state of cows and calves. We need much more precision in terms of terminology. What we mean is irresponsible breeding on a small scale or a big scale and we need to have clear, understand advice and information for both breeders and the buying public.

Anne McBride – It great to hear about health tests however it is a limited view to say that behaviour is down to socialisation. Behaviour is a result of both nature and nurture. It is important that breeders take into account the behaviour of both dam and sire. Terminology of breed standards needs to be clearer and behaviour must be included.

David Cavill (Animal Care College) - I am pleased to see that over the past 4 years people and organisations have been realising the complexities of this problem. Hundreds of simplistic arguments were put forward initially but we now realize how difficult it is. All the different levels need to be understood and considered. That is the importance of working together.

Marc Abraham (Vet) - I am interested in the trend of cross breeds and as a vet I see lots of owners asking for advice on this. We need to recognise there are some excellent cross breeders out there and so would the KC ever consider their Assured Breeders Scheme to include these as a mark of gold standard so us vets can point out good assured breeders to drive business away from puppy farmers again?

James Yeates (RSPCA) – I agree on the behaviour issues and whilst we want to talk about deed not breed we can talk about genetic predispositions to behaviour so there is a complexity to this. On the data point, we cannot wait and not do anything whilst waiting for the collation of this. The Assured Breeders Scheme needs to reward responsible breeders in fact there should be a focus on reward rather than just punishment or control. We should be moving towards leaving behind the idea that having a registered breed is a sign of quality to saying that having an assured bred dog is a sign of excellence which means breaking the pedigree dog quality mark and making it a wider remit.

Steve Dean (Kennel Club) –There is no reason why the Scheme cannot apply to designer breeders. If people have a desire to work under our Scheme we would be delighted to talk to them. It must be noted that some people breed any Labrador with any Poodle with no regard to health and so on so they are picking up inherited problems from both parents. On behaviour issues yes of course we are aware that behaviour is part of the factors you select from when choosing stud dogs but maybe we need to get that information out a bit wider. We do need to get our terminology right and clear.

Paula Boyden (Dog's Trust)– We need to be working together on a single puppy contract as we are only confusing the public at the moment. Education is important but we need to get the information to people collectively.

Robin Hargreaves (BVA) – It is right that there needs to reward for excellence. With the Labradoddle situation they are £800 each for a puppy with no screening and people pay it. People do not need to spend money making it better as they get the money anyway and that is a big problem which is very evident.

Bill Lambert (KC) – I want to reinforce what Steve was saying about the Assured Breeder Scheme being open to cross breeds and there are already some on the scheme. The problem is they are bred for commercial purposes and the prices went through the roof driving irresponsible breeders to produce these dogs. On the puppy contract, the KC is not against this and the Assured Breeders have been using a contract for nearly 10 years. I hope we can iron out those differences and we have not had an opportunity make changes in its current form. I do agree we need to collaborate.

Sally Philips (RSPCA) – I have just returned from Coventry for a conference on Status Dogs where we had 20 representatives from 20 police forces, dog wardens and council wardens all with the concern and enthusiasm to sort this out. Some sort of registration is a very popular idea. 8,000 to 10,00 healthy dogs are put to sleep every year as there are not enough homes but then there are kennels importing dogs from Hungary, Romania etc. The public must

know about dogs being put to sleep and this should be part of the education programme. At the RSPCA, we hold regular animal welfare events where we help with neutering often free micro-chipping, vet checks. There are ways of making registration and identification work effectively to help all parties.

Kendal Shepherd – The idea that different ends can be addressed by same methods needs to be stopped and we need to really look at the dog human relationship to go forward. Defra funded a Liverpool study with useful information on the human animal relationship and this should be looked at more.

Professor Crispin (Advisory Council) – That is true, you cannot detach dogs from humans. You can read a lot in a puppy's face and a breeding bitch's face. Dogs need proper human company and it is an important aspect in responsibility. Why do some people have dogs at all? It is because breeders can make a lot of money from them. Another aspect is why people are stupid enough to pay the money so we need to educate people to reconsider buying a dog in the first place. How long is it since we had a wide education campaign on the responsibility of dog ownership? Sadly if you look at figures you produce as many dogs are as killed and this cannot be right.

James Yeates (RSPCA) – The registration can be funded by the £17 which I mentioned earlier so it can work at a low cost. Where we do have good collaborate work we should education more generally together. People need to make more careful choices, right pet for right owner and we should be making them think about this before buying.

Steve Dean (KC) – On the issue of people and dogs, people want to buy dogs and the demand is there. 15,000 a day go on the KC website looking for pedigree puppies and there is a dearth of supply. Every time we crank up standards it means less good puppies being produced and more people go to bad breeders. The compulsory micro-chipping needs to be similar to the shotgun licence so that purchaser and seller have to update the database to ensure better information. I believe it can be done for modest one off fee, not an annual fee. As an ex civil servant I know as soon as a fee system is in place you need a fair army of admin assistants to pay for rather than money going to improve welfare. 60% of dog owners already micro-chip and an annual fee punishes the responsible not irresponsible.

Geoffrey Clifton Brown MP –Say I might be a novice dog owner I have been on Sheila's site, I have found a reputable breeder and I have a puppy contract what does that ultimately mean? I am worried this contract could be reinforcing bad practice in relation to inherited diseases because as I have that contract I think my dog will be of good health and good conformation. How can it be guaranteed? In some breeds we are making progress but in others lagging behind and so you are not always going to get a healthy dog no matter what tools you have until you have dealt with all the breeds.

Debbie (Dog Theft Action) – There are 4 UK databases for micro-chipping offering different services and prices. If a dog gets stolen there are loads of people who won't scan the microchip so there is another side of micro-chipping which needs to be looked at.

Heidi Anderson (Chance Pixies) – If you control the source you control the problem. To register dog you should have to pass breeding tests and cannot breed until that is done. If we control breeders, we control the problems. DNA identification should also be considered.

Carol Fowler (Cavalier Campaign)– The Assured Breeders Scheme has been promoted a lot and talked about and it would seem to be the cream of the cream but why are the health tests on it largely just recommended but not required? It is a breeder's choice and having done the test if the dog falls below the standard why is the dog not withdrawn from the scheme?

Lord Sandy Tree – Micro-chipping is useless unless it is enforced. Has financial modelling been done for the £17 licensing idea which James mentioned to show this is possible?

James Yeates (RSPCA)– We have modelled it with different amounts and £17 was with 75% compliance and I think we can be more optimistic. We did a study of people who would pay that and around the same number would pay over £30 for dog licensing. There is an 80 million pound cost to society from the issues that arise from irresponsible dog

ownership. The concern about punishing responsible people is not an issue here because we are already punishing innocent tax-payers so this way it would take it onto the irresponsible owners.

Paula Boyden (Dog's Trust) – There needs to be a penalty for failing to update records on database with regards to micro-chipping. A central reunification number which the databases need to subscribe to must be part of the legislation.

Steve Dean (KC) – There are 4 UK database of which KC is one with PetLog and we are already talking about coming up with simple common quarters. DNA costs are too high but certainly something for the future. There are health tests which are strongly required as key tests and other are recommended as emerging or low prevalence which are not necessary. We select the most important and key issues to deal with foremost making them necessary.

Neil Parish MP – There does seem to be areas of agreement amongst the organisations now and ways forward which is good progress. I think that there needs to be discussion over the Puppy Contract and getting an agreed version in place. I think all members have agreed that this evening, I will ask Marisa to put a short list together on these points for the meeting we have with the Minister for Companion Animal Welfare tomorrow morning and also to send it to the EFRA Committee clerk who has asked to be kept informed of our discussion.

Dr Anne McBride and Kendal Shepherd – Statement to APGAW on Dangerous Dogs, Issues of Natural Justice, Welfare and Prevention

We have concerns relating to current legislation and suggestions on how to improve this relating to dog seizure, assessment and measures to prevent dog-related injury. Currently any dog of any genetic make up can be seized either simply because of how it looks or because of an incident. If deemed not dangerous the dog can be returned to its owner, possibly with control orders in place. If deemed of type but not to be dangerous it can be added to the Exemption Register and needs to meet certain requirements. The seizure and kennelling in an unknown environment, often is isolation with little human contact which can lead to mental deterioration and even physical problems. This contravenes the Animal Welfare Act at all levels because of a lack of knowledge and due process.

An example of a dog called Brandy who was seized as a suspected Pitbull not as the result on an incident. She was then held for 7 months whilst an expert assessment was conducted and in this time had no physical interaction with a human and her behaviour signs which were sever ataxia and incoordination were seen to be aggressive by kennel staff. After the court hearing Brandy was put on the exemption list and returned to her owner but not before the conditions of the exemption register has been met which included spaying. During the process MRI scans revealed a spinal cyst beyond treatment and Brandy was euthanized.

For owners of dogs seized under Section 4b of the DDA because of the way they look there are 2 further issues. First is the pressure to plead Guilty as it is a civil charge and there is no access to legal aid1 so owners may have to pleased guilty get the dog on the exemption order simply to get it home sooner and with less cost. Second, once home the owners will find Pet Health Insurance is denied t them as their pet is on the Register. This then has welfare implications as the owner may not be able to afford future treatments and reduced the compliance for 3rd Party Insurance.

Seized dogs are often held for several months before being assessed and this could be prevented with good practice, yet information regarding policies and processes of those holding the dog is often unavailable. We believe there is a need to obtain and assess such information and produce an informed Code of Practice relevant under the AAW. The RSPCA good practice guidelines could be used as a starting point.

Onto considering Natural Justice to the Owner which there is a duty to meet, as expert witnesses we are obliged to provide the courts with a report based on an objective and valid assessment which needs to be done before a a plea is entered. As experts we need full disclosure including statements about not only the incident but the dog's history, training, management and health alongside full records of the environment the dog is held, its routine, and levels of interaction with people and other animals. Further assessment of the dog must then take place under conditions where there is minimal stress and distraction for the dog. However, the case is usually that the dog is transported to an unfamiliar location determined by police with little regard for minimising stress. We then assess the dogs in

unsuitable locations with no safety measures and lots of distractions. It is important for us to see how the owner relates to the dog to give advice on future issues but in most seized dog cases requests by defence experts for owners to be present at an assessment are refused by the police.

Another area of concern is natural justice for the public with the aim of reducing injury caused by dogs. Prevention is an important part of this and can only be accomplished by increasing responsible ownership and providing appropriate information regarding human-dog interactions to all the public. The vast majority of dog related injuries do not come to court and so learning opportunities are lost, evidence is not collected and the dog is destroyed without assessment being made. Having clear educational base based information is much more useful than the current situation of people dismissing incidents as freak accidents.

It is worth mentioning that there is no casual relationship between dog related injury and dog breed or type.

Issues of welfare and natural justice can be greatly improved by steps including writing a code of practice for kennels and requiring co-operation of all parties to ensure timely, objective and valid assessments of all animals involved. Inclusion of behaviour and training advice as standard in control orders and implementing a recording system of enforcement will reduce reoffending. Information on all the cases of dog injury needs to be collated and understood through an open multi-disciplinary approach to investigation and education if the public are to benefit from policies and legislation that reduces harm.

END OF MEETING