



WATCHDOG

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THE SECRET SOCIETY (cont.)

We have repeatedly criticised the oppressive and unnecessary secrecy surrounding the work of the Council. When Council members were recently urged not to talk to anyone outside Council, it is a safe bet that something is seriously wrong with the Society's governing body. This was quickly confirmed by the description of the selection process for a new Chief Executive as

A FARCE AND A SHAMBLES

by two members of the selection panel Mrs Jacq Denham and Ms Linda Rimington. Jacq Denham has admitted leaking confidential information to the press.

Not content with this, Jacq Denham and Linda Rimington circulated an E Mail to Council members in which the competence of the Chairman of Council, Richard Ryder and Council member Ann Wignall was questioned. This was a grossly improper letter and was rightly criticised by Council member Eileen Chamberlain. In response Linda Rimington issued another E Mail (20/09/02 at 12.02pm) in which she wrote "You are absolutely right I should not have called Ann and Richard incompetent. I just could not think of another word for it."

She then proceeded to write

"Jacq and myself have been involved in a selection process which we feel has been manipulated by the chair, David Thomas."

Opening a New Chapter in Openness and Transparency - Introduction from John Stoker

Welcome to the Summer 2002 edition of Charity Commission News. The key theme of this issue is "transparency" - from individual charities, the sector as a whole and from ourselves. The number of people with a stake in charity continues to grow, and expectations on charities to demonstrate transparency are greater than ever.

We are responding to these demands with initiatives such as our regulatory reports, which look at key issues affecting

the charitable sector and offer practical ways to address these.

Our programme of review visits to charities will also look to foster best practice and disseminate the many examples of this we find as widely as possible.

I hope you find this edition of Charity Commission News a useful starting point when looking at transparency in your charity.

Council members should realise that they have a duty towards the Society's members to behave in a responsible manner. The present Council is torn apart by infighting to the detriment of the animals they should be helping and to the proper management of the RSPCA.

There should be an inquiry into the behaviour of Mrs Denham and Ms Rimington and into their allegations of manipulation by the Panel Chairman. Not to do so is unfair to the candidates and a smear on the reputation of the RSPCA. The Charity Commission has called for openness and transparency in charities. When is the Council going to respond to the call to open up the Society?

In the last newsletter we pleaded "LET US BE NICE TO ONE ANOTHER." This obviously fell on deaf ears as far as some Council members are concerned.

In another Daily Telegraph article (09/09/02) it is reported that Jacq Denham and Linda Rimington wrote to the rest of the panel charged with choosing the next Chief Executive threatening to resign if Mrs Ballard's name went forward to the full Council for approval. Issuing threats to get their own way? Is this what we expect of RSPCA trustees?

By THOMAS PENNY

LAWYERS have been called in to sort out the chaotic attempt by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals to select a new chief executive.

The panel charged with choosing a successor to Peter Davies failed to come to a conclusion after presentations from four shortlisted candidates on Monday and is still in disarray after a week of arguments and crisis meetings.

Questions have also been asked about the actions of David Thomas, the panel's chairman, who has been championing Michelle Thew, one of his employers, for the RSPCA's top job.

He is a solicitor and legal consultant for the British Union for the Abolition of Vivisection (BUAV) and Ms Thew, its chief executive, is on the shortlist.

A meeting has been scheduled for Monday in an attempt to bring an end to the debacle, which has cost the charity thousands of pounds and further damaged its public image.

The charity is in the middle of a review to cut £2 million from its expenditure and the cost of bringing in lawyers is adding to its financial problems. The panel, which is made up of six members of the chari-

ty's ruling council, was supposed to select one candidate on Monday who would go forward to a meeting of the full council at the end of the month, but because it could not agree, it selected two.

They were Steve Marshall, the former chief executive of Railtrack, and Ms Thew.

Jackie Ballard, the former Liberal Democrat MP who was favourite to take the job before Monday's interviews, failed to impress the panel with her presentation and was not selected.

The panel asked Mr Marshall and Ms Thew to make further presentations at a meeting of the full 25 member council on Sept 25 so it could make a final decision.

But the process was derailed when Mr Marshall refused to go forward to another interview if he did not have the panel's full support.

He is also understood to have complained to the recruitment consultant overseeing the process about the aggressive way he was questioned by Mr Thomas during his interview.

Members of the RSPCA's council raised their concerns that Mr Thomas was chairing the panel after the confidential shortlist published in *The Daily Telegraph* earlier this

week revealed that Ms Thew was on it. Mr Thomas is Ms Thew's most vocal supporter on the panel and denies that there is a conflict of interest between him working for her organisation and interviewing her for a job at the RSPCA.

Mr Thomas said last night: "The important point is that full disclosure of the connection is made, which happened in this case."

Lawyers were called in after Mr Thomas objected to attempts to strip him of his right to vote for Ms Thew.

The society had to bring in lawyers from outside because Mark Love, its own director of legal services, had applied for the job as chief executive so was ruled to have a conflict of interest.

Mr Marshall was persuaded not to withdraw his candidacy on Tuesday, despite his anger at the way he had allegedly been treated and the wrangling has continued throughout the week.

Sources at the RSPCA estimate the cost of the attempt to find a new chief executive at £40,000, including the use of a specialist recruitment firm.

A member of the council said: "The whole process has been a debacle. It's a farce.

"They've spent thousands of pounds which could have been spent on animals."

THE DAILY
TELEGRAPH
14/09/02

Lawyers called in over selection of new RSPCA chief

Why are the Council and its civil servants so afraid of the truth? If these leaks were untruthful then it would be only just that someone should get out of their pram as it would be unjust to be spreading lies, but this is not the situation. All the things that have been 'leaked' to Watchdog have been simply the truth. Perhaps if there were more open government in the RSPCA people would be less inclined to spill the beans. As it is we have investigations being carried out about the source of the leaky RSPCA all with money given for the animals to stop the cruelty inflicted on them. Yet thousands of this money will go into the hands of lawyers, not for the first time, to ensure that no council member commits the heinous crime of telling the membership what is going on. Of course some matters on Council have to be confidential, such as personnel matters, but should the matters relating to policies on animals be secret such as what is going on in Freedom Food? Money given to Freedom Food from the RSPCA coffers will have to come from members who are not even allowed to know the whereabouts of the farms, nor are their elected representatives on Council permitted to know in most cases. Many decisions are now made by Officers of Council with no recourse to the trustees that you or I voted for. If the trustees and civil servants are so embarrassed about the truth perhaps they should look at exactly what they are doing that is embarrassing if the membership gets wind of it.

In my experience the only people worried about leaks are those that do not want the truth to come out - do not want the Society members to question motivations and actions.

I have learned with regret the resignation of Angela Walder from the Council. I have known Angela for 25 years and admired her total commitment to preventing cruelty to animals. I have been on demonstrations with her (notably the ones at the Cocksparrow Fur Farm), been expelled from the Society with her, been arrested with her for protesting against ritual slaughter and worked with her in the BUAV and on the Watchdog newsletter. She cannot tolerate money being poured into Freedom Food whilst Animal Homes are being closed down. She was the one Council

Charity row over cash for 'Freedom Food'

By THOMAS PENNY

STAFF at the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals will be told today of a series of cuts to the charity's services to tackle a financial crisis caused by losses on the stock market and controversial spending decisions.

The charity's trustees were told in July that savings of £2 million were needed and these were finalised during a stormy two-day meeting last week.

One member of the society's ruling council has resigned after it was decided to spend another £1 million on the controversial Freedom Food scheme, even though two new animal centres will not now be built.

Angela Walder resigned after the council voted to postpone plans for a new centre at Chester-le-Street, Co Durham, and a clinic at Mertyr, south Wales. Papers presented to the council said that stopping both projects would "seriously affect animal wel-

fare provision" in the two areas. An RSPCA worker from Co Durham said: "The RSPCA spent tens of thousands of pounds getting planning permission and fighting a planning inquiry and now they're not going to build it - it's a tragedy for the animals and that's what the RSPCA's supposed to be about."

The rebuilding of an animal hospital in Birmingham has also been put on hold and staff pay will be frozen and vacancies left unfilled while the society tightens its belt.

About 60 jobs will go with the closure of three of the society's 10 regional headquarters, starting with the one covering Essex and Sussex, and the number of inspectors monitoring livestock markets is to be cut back.

The Freedom Food scheme, which enables farmers to get higher prices for their produce if they sign-up to better welfare standards, has been criticised over monitoring levels and because it covers animals which are not at risk

while doing nothing for the farms at the margins where the worst suffering occurs.

A society spokesman confirmed that capital projects had been put on hold and that salaries had been frozen. She said that the regional centres and the number of market inspectors were still being reviewed and added that the budget for Freedom Food had also been cut.

The two-day council meeting in Loughborough also attempted to solve the crisis over the selection of the society's new chief executive.

Trustees heard three separate legal opinions on whether the chairman of the panel charged with choosing the successor to Peter Davies had a conflict of interest over his part in the process.

David Thomas denies that there is anything wrong in him interviewing Michelle Thew, the chief executive of the British Union for the Abolition of Vivisection, even though he works for her organisation as a legal adviser.

Council member who comforted Bernice Jones when she was removed from Branch office. M. HOUSE

The above statement was Angela's last contribution to Watchdog in February 2000 before she knew about Lewis Page's resolution which stifled freedom of expression for Council members and staff.

The article on the left was published in the Daily Telegraph on 30/09/02.

It should be noted that the events leading to the present difficulties occurred BEFORE Richard Ryder became Chairman.

Animal rights campaigner dies aged 80

AN ANIMAL rights campaigner who devoted 50 years of her life to saving pets and wildlife has died in hospital, aged 80.

Bernice Jones founded and ran Gwent Animal Rescue, at Llanhen-nock, until she was hospitalised after a stroke, two months ago.

Mrs Jones set up the sanctuary in 1986 after her branch of the RSPCA was closed down and 33 dogs killed because of alleged over-crowding.

A fervent opposer to the destruction of animals she saved over 500 dogs a year and worked tirelessly against the Dangerous Dogs Act.

Graham Phillips, who worked and cared for Mrs Jones described her as a wonderful caring woman.

He said, "She took me in when I

CLAIRE HILL

was down and out and provided me with a job.

"For 12 years I have looked after her as a carer as well as working with her.

"It is still quite a shock to me, I am just a bit fazed. I really don't know what will happen to the rescue centre but if I could achieve a fraction of what she did in her life then I would be very proud."

Mrs Jones began her career with animals in her thirties.

She was an unpaid honorary secretary in Gwent for 28 years for the RSPCA.

In 1960 she set up the charity's Newport Animal Centre in Ringland.

However, controversy struck in 1985 when a senior RSPCA council member accused her of overcrowding the kennels. Mrs Jones was sacked along with the rest of the committee and 33 dogs were killed.

This occurred months after the committee was praised by the RSPCA for its work.

At the time newspaper reports said staff had to pull dogs out of bins to make sure they were dead and one member of staff was so distraught she took an overdose of tablets.

After this event Gwent Animal Rescue was set up with a policy of no destruction.

The charity supported itself with Christmas fairs and annual dog shows.

Mrs Jones also campaigned tire-

lessly against the Dangerous Dogs Act, going to court with some of the cases to stop the destruction of animals and picketing government offices.

She did not only help family pets such as cats and dogs. Her campaign stopped fishing in Tredegar lake after a family of swans were killed from lead poisoning.

She readily admitted that her work and dedication to animals led to the break-up of her marriage.

Her shelter was so important to her that she when she was hospitalised just before Christmas she worked from her bed organising the annual Christmas fete.

Mr Phillips said, "She loved any kind of animal and would go to any extremes to save them."

Members who knew Bernice Jones will be sad to learn of her death.

The RSPCA Council is notorious for the unjust treatment of the Society's members.

The killing of 33 of her dogs by the RSPCA was cruel and unnecessary.

The senior Council member who accused her received the Society's highest award.

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

"QUEEN VICTORIA SILVER MEDAL - the Society's highest meritorious award reserved for the most exceptional cases - Lewis Page in recognition of his enormous contribution to the life and work of the Society." Quote from Animal Life Autumn 2002.

For suppression of freedom of expression in the RSPCA ????????

Article 10 Human Rights Act Freedom of Expression.

"You have the right to hold opinions and express your views on your own or in a group. This applies even if they are unpopular or disturbing."

In the RSPCA Council minutes of 22/09/99, it is recorded that Lewis Page proposed a successful motion which stopped Council members from giving (either deliberately or negligently) confidential information to RSPCA MEMBERS' Watchdog and prevented Council members from participation in or management of the newsletter under threat of removal from the Council. Staff who committed the same crime would be disciplined." (NOTE everything the Council does is considered confidential.)

QUOTE FROM MINUTES "Mrs Adams objected strongly to this resolution and insisted as did some other members of Council that she should have free speech outside the Council chamber as well as in it."

CONGRATULATIONS to Dorothy Adams and to the other unnamed members who objected to the suppression of freedom of expression and spoke for a more open Society.

Charities stand accused of frittering away millions on the stock market

The RSPCA will announce today that its crippling stock market losses are forcing it to halt all construction work, a decision that will hit vital projects from Merthyr to Durham.

The decision, which comes as a bitter blow to thousands of staff, demonstrates the depth of the charity's exposure to the vagaries of share price movements.

Some observers of the charity sector are sceptical about the way the RSPCA has invested its money of late. A new £16m headquarters in Horsham, Sussex, has been almost as contentious as the decision to spend £40,000 pursuing an inquiry last year into the activities of David Mawson, a vegetarian chef and member of its council. The cost of the failed attempt to suspend him from the council is reported to have included £3,560 to track his e-mails.

But there's harder work up ahead for the RSPCA, which has a fight on its hands to keep the morale of its staff from plummeting. As well as the construction project fall-out, about 60 jobs will go with the closure of three of its 10 regional headquarters and the pay of every staff member is to be frozen.

A MEMBER WRITES

" I confess to be totally shattered to discover that the Scottish Hunt Ban is a total con..and they are still hunting with hounds and holding the hounds back while they continue to shoot the poor foxes!!!! This is despicable and a total travesty... and it wears down the heart and spirit of those of us who spend so much of our time (and in my case pension) in fighting every aspect of cruelty and injustice whether to man or beast."

"Who was it said 'if those carrying out the cruelty of blood sports were wearing black leather jackets and on motorbikes, they'd be locked up at once!'???

It's a thought isn't it?"

THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The 2003 RSPCA AGM is to be held in Birmingham. For many members it is impossible to get there in time without increasing the air pollution by driving a car or staying the night in an hotel.

It is time that Council members (other than those on duty on the day) refrain from claiming expenses OR refrain from voting. To do both is undemocratic.

ARTHUR SCHOPENHAUR 1788-1860 from Fruits of Paradise by Rebecca Hall

The assumption that animals are without rights and the illusion that our treatment of them has no moral significance is a positively outrageous example of Western cruelty and barbarity. Universal compassion is the only guarantee of morality."

RSPCA DOGS' HOME PROJECT POSTPONED

THE ANNOUNCEMENT two years ago that the RSPCA was to build a £3m home for abandoned pets in Chester-le-Street, Co Durham, was greeted with delight. A major facility in Gateshead had closed in the 1990s and dogs' homes were swamped by the 3,500 animals collected each year.

But it will be confirmed today that the project is being postponed, even though the RSPCA has already bought a 100-acre farm and a neighbouring former college to accommodate the home.

The charity says it has other spending priorities, and also blames the plunging value of its stock market investments, which has forced it to find savings of £12m. The decision has prompted a member of the RSPCA's ruling council, Angela Walder, to resign.

A local RSPCA worker said: "It's a tragedy for the animals ... The RSPCA spent tens of thousands of pounds getting planning permission and fighting a planning inquiry and now they're not going to build it."

Extracts from an article by Ian Herbert

in The Independent Tuesday 01/10/02

.. and the RSPCA award goes to the abattoir that kills 12,000 turkeys an hour in a gas chamber

SLAUGHTER 'HONOUR'

A SLAUGHTERHOUSE that kills up to 12,000 turkeys an hour is in line for an RSPCA award.

Britain's biggest animal welfare charity has shortlisted the abattoir for a humane award.

It can kill 12,000 birds an hour with a mix of poisonous gases such as carbon monoxide, nitrogen and carbon dioxide.

The system has been developed by Norfolk company Anglia Autoflow, which sports a logo of a happy chicken in sunglasses reclining in a death crate.

The birds' journey to the gas chamber begins when they are caught by a "harvester" and placed in crates.

The crates are taken on a lorry to the abattoir where they are put in trays and loaded onto a conveyor belt. They are then sent into a large steel compartment where fatal gases are released.

The poisons make the birds struggle for air, flapping their wings and gasping before they fall unconscious. They are then hung upside down by their feet on rails and decapitated before being plucked and packaged.

The system, which has been installed at Brandon's Poultry in Scropton, Derbyshire, has been praised because it minimises stress on the animals.

Now Anglia Autoflow has entered their machine for the Alastair Mews Award 2002, a scheme run by the RSPCA to promote humane treatment

EXCLUSIVE

By SUSIE BONIFACE

of animals. Previous winners include a supplier of fast-food chain KFC and a team which developed a fan-ventilated truck for transporting poultry.

Brandon's chairman David Brandon said the gas chamber would be used to provide birds for local supermarkets.

An RSPCA spokesman said: "The Anglia Autoflow system is being considered because it allows the birds to be taken from the lorry to slaughter without being handled by humans.

"It alleviates the main source of stress to the animals. It is the first of its kind for turkeys in Britain, and it's something the RSPCA consider to be better for them," he said.

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HAS THE RSPCA LOST ITS WAY?

Many ordinary members have the view that some Council members are far more interested in sending E Mails 'slagging off' each other than concentrating on what sort of message Freedom Food is giving to the public.

The height of absurdity was reached on 30/09/02 when Council member Sally Phillips sent an E mail to David Mawson instead of to David Thomas! She was promoting herself for appointment to the Finance Committee. She wrote "I feel that a certain person can no longer be trusted so I could stand against her." It was obvious to whom she was referring.

Is it so surprising that ordinary members prefer not to vote in the Council elections? The present frenzied situation on the Council serves to illustrate how necessary it is to have an open Society, without all the stupid and unnecessary confidentiality. Members have a right to know how the Society's trustees behave on Council.

We only hope that Council members who descend to quarrelsome behaviour are not elected to chair ANY MEETING.

Our full support goes to Richard Ryder who has the unenviable task of putting the Society back on course. The financial situation is grave. Is it surprising when over the past 4 years the staff was increased by 37%. During that time Tomlinson and Phipps were chairing the Council.

Thank you for all your letters and phone calls. We will keep barking!

THE WATCHDOGS