

COVID-19 and the Animal Welfare Sector

Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee Response - The impact of COVID-19 on the charity sector

Introduction

Charities are currently playing a vital role in supporting society through this unprecedented crisis and animal welfare organisations are no exception. The Association of Dogs and Cats Homes (ADCH), a membership organisation which promotes best practice for dog and cat rescue organisations, plays an important role in supporting the wider animal welfare sector to respond to the current challenge. Whatever the external context of the outbreak, the work of animal rescues must continue – the animals still need our care.

Many smaller animal rescue organisations are currently facing an extremely uncertain future. In April, ADCH conducted a survey of its members, which consists of over 150 rescues both large and small drawn from across eight different jurisdictions in the British Isles. The survey revealed that 87% of rescues were required to stop rehoming animals and 71% have closed their shelters to the public. Furthermore, 55% of respondents have reported a drop in income of over 50%.

ADCH is working on a variety of fronts to support its members and the wider animal welfare sector. It has set up an Emergency Fund to support the smallest charities, which exist without the reserves and fundraising capacity of their larger colleagues. It is also co-ordinating the donation and distribution of supplies; developing a series of forums and mechanisms for members to be able to come together to share support, advice and guidance with each other; and has compiled and distributed operational guidance backed by Government. However, it is only able to do this because of the spirit of co-operation and mutual understanding that exists across its membership.

This document provides further information on how COVID-19 has impacted the animal welfare sector, as set out by ADCH members in response to the survey, and the steps ADCH is taking to respond to the crisis including an outline of how the Government can help.

ADCH Member Survey

Background

ADCH represents 150 member organisations in eight jurisdictions in the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland (England, Guernsey, Isle of Man, Jersey, Northern Ireland, Republic of Ireland, Scotland, Wales). To assess the impact of Coronavirus on the rescue sector, the Association conducted a survey of all its members running between 7-10 April 2020 and chased reminders 15-20 April.

The aim of the survey was to identify the concerns and practical issues felt by the sector, and help the governments and administrations in each of the eight jurisdictions assess the impact of COVID-19 on the operations, funding and sustainability of animal rescue charities. Responses were obtained from 134 members (89% of all members) across all eight jurisdictions in which ADCH operates.

Findings

The findings clearly show that COVID-19 poses a huge threat to the sustainability of the UK and Ireland's dog and cat rescue sector. The disease has impacted on 95% of ADCH members. Whilst the outbreak has yet to adversely impact the behaviour of the dog and cat-owning population and, indeed, seems to be encouraging more interest in owning or fostering a dog or cat, there are concerns that fundraising for the sector has almost completely ceased and the short term financial sustainability of many rescues is in doubt.

The full survey report is attached to this email. A summary of the key findings is below. This is the only significant research undertaking on the impact of Covid-19 on the animal rescue sector since the outbreak began:

The main findings are:

- 95% of rescues report an impact from Coronavirus on their work or ability to operate with only 5% reporting no impact.
- Over 90% of rescues have to date taken contingency measures to deal with Coronavirus
- 87% of rescues have stopped rehoming animals and 71% have closed their shelters to the public
- 54% of all rescues have stopped taking in animals, 46% of rescues still taking in animals
- Numbers of dogs and cats will continue to rise amongst rescues as dogs and cats continue to be accepted but rehoming has only just restarted. This increases costs on the rescue organisations.
- All 134 rescues which responded to the survey report restrictions have had a negative impact on fundraising:
 - 55% report a drop in income of over 50%
 - 20% a drop of income between 20% and 50%
- 57% of members have closed their shops and 100% have cancelled fundraising events
- 32% of rescues have reduced staffing levels under the Governments' furlough schemes
- 85% of rescues have seen a reduction in volunteers
- Only 52% of members have funds that will ensure they can continue to operate for over three months. 32% had less than three months funds, 5% less than a month and 13% reported they did not know how long their funds would last.
- 20% of rescues have applied for grants but some are being penalized by having three months reserves in place, widely seen as a minimum level for a charity
- Access to neutering and microchipping has been severely reduced: 80% of rescues reporting reduced access to non-essential veterinary treatments such as neutering and microchipping
- 48% of report reduced access to essential veterinary treatments

- An increase in illegal non microchipped dogs seems inevitable
- 17% of rescues report more cats are being abandoned. This may be already the first signs of the impact of a reduction in cat neutering. A rise in the cat population due to reduced neutering is highly likely
- Impact on dogs more limited than anticipated. Only 15% of rescue organisations report an increase in dogs being abandoned with more 17%, reporting fewer dogs being abandoned than normal. 16% of members report taking in fewer stray dogs
- Only a quarter of members report that more people wish to hand over their dogs.
- 66% of rescues have reported more people wish to foster dogs or cats and 35% wish to rehome a dog or cat

ADCH actions

Grants and Funding

ADCH is striving to offer financial and practical support to its members in need, at a time when many normal or historic sources of funding are unavailable..

An ADCH Fundraising Committee and [Emergency Grant Fund](#) has been established to co-ordinate delivering funding and grants to its members, beginning with those who reported extreme financial distress in response to the survey. ADCH has established an Emergency fund, paid for by major animal welfare charities Battersea and Dogs Trust, and major partners Mars and PetPlan. This is targeted specifically at smaller organisations, with a view to making grants available for as many organisations turning over less than £500,000 per annum specifically to get through the Covid-19 outbreak. ADCH also ran a fundraising and grants webinar on 20 April and highlights new sources of funding to its members through its daily newsletters and bulletins.

Support Member Discussions

As a membership organisation, ADCH understands that its members can depend upon and support each other, and so has organised ways for members to benefit from this community. At the onset of the crisis, ADCH set up a protocol for responding to member emails and calls regarding Coronavirus and monitors, tracking and consolidating a list of questions and requests.

A closed Facebook group for members has been established to encourage joint and regional working and to facilitate the sharing of advice and resources. This has seen operational questions answered, food and resources shared, and advice given on quick and easy ways of stimulating fundraising at a time when events and face to face methods are not possible. ADCH moderates this page and responds to the questions and enquiries raised by members through this forum, including taking questions and advice to Government.

Information and guidance

Responding to the survey, ADCH members said they needed clarity and to understand what COVID-19 meant for their organisations. Therefore, ADCH has worked with the sector and the Government to create and issue guidance to keep its members informed. The guidance is attached to this email for reference.

The ADCH worked with the dog and cat sector body the Canine and Feline Sector Group (CFSG), and DEFRA officials, on providing operational guidance on how to safely and legally continue to operate within the Coronavirus Regulations. This was issued on 20 April, and where there have been further requests for clarification ADCH has provided answers; and it remains continually under review. However, animal rescue charities are complex organisations and the need for good reliable advice remains.

In addition to this, ADCH has provided guidance and FAQs for its members on topics including:

- **Furloughing staff and associated advice notes**
- **Annual Leave considerations and options**
- **Trustee Responsibilities**, including links to Charity Commission, NCVO etc
- **Latest Charity Commission guidance** on serious incident reporting, EGM, annual accounts etc
- **Access to personal protective equipment**
- **Animal Welfare: Operational**, including animal journey and working within remit of 'social distancing' guidelines, protocols for handing over an animal from Covid household, PPE, euthanasia, etc.

It has also shared Standard Operating Procedures from member organisations to aid members in adjusting their operations in this difficult time.

ADCH added a new page to its website on Coronavirus FAQs, split into 'For Rescues' and 'For Pet Owners'. The website now provides links to latest advice, guidance and infographics from organisations including PHE, NHS, DEFRA, GOV.UK, NCVO, the Charity Commission and the CFSG.

ADCH has run a variety of webinars for its members on topics including Managing Governance, Trustee Responsibilities and Budgeting and Legal and Financial Advice. It is also sending its members daily bulletins, providing the most recent guidance on a range of topics such as fundraising, staff, legal, governance and working from home.

ADCH is also reaching out beyond its membership to share advice with the wider sector, contacting hundreds of other rescues with Operational Guidance and funding opportunities to ensure that animals are being cared for, and those running rescues are supported, whether they are inside ADCH umbrella or not.

Food and supplies

Rescues are struggling financially and logistically but are determined to provide for the welfare needs of the animals in their care. ADCH is working to support them by organising

donations of food and other essential supplies and services to members. While income is significantly suffering for charities across the sector, and many fundraising methods will not be possible for some months hence, there are certain fixed costs that must be borne, and pet food and kennel or cattery enrichment are among these costs.

ADCH is currently in the process of setting up donations of pet food and other supplies from manufacturers and distributing them to its members. It has contacted its sponsors and supporters to see if there is other support which can be offered free of charge to member organisations including finance, advice and goods.

The future

While recognising that the duration and full impacts of the crisis on people and charities are not yet known, it is clear that **the impact will not just be short term**. Any shock to the economy, of which there may be many in coming months, will have an impact both in terms of people's capacity to give, their capacity to take on a new pet (meaning animals may stay in rescues longer) or in terms of abandonments. Currently, the sector is being protected to a significant degree by Government support – particularly through the furlough scheme. However, this will not last indefinitely and given the likely length of the economic impact of Covid-19, the animal rescue sector faces a very precarious future.

If a rescue were required to close its doors, the need for which it is catering does not go away or diminish. Consequently, the pressure will only increase elsewhere in the sector.

How the Government Can Help

Furloughing

Animal welfare charities are using the Government's furlough scheme to avoid making their staff redundant. Through the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS), the Government will pay 80% of their salaries up to £2500 a month from March to June. 32% of ADCH members report that they have furloughed staff under this scheme.

While this is welcome, this can create issues for charities. Some of the conditionality applied to the Government's Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) makes the scheme less flexible for charities. Many charities have expressed some concern both on the operability of the scheme and clarity about how and when payments will be received.

This is also the case for charity shops, which are a vital part of a charity's financial make up yet cannot currently open. However, rents on premises must still be paid.

Grants

Many ADCH members reported difficulties in accessing Government grants and that the process was too complicated. In particular, some felt they were being penalised for having reserves, despite this being a requirement for charities. When asked what would help, one

ADCH member responded calling for 'unrestricted grants for core funding that enables grassroots organisations like ours to survive.' This answer was typical of the feedback ADCH receives from its members. ADCH would appreciate the opportunity to discuss these experiences in more depth with the Government, to give further consideration as to how more unrestricted funding pots can be made available.

In addition, some funds established for charities are not being crafted in a way that accounts for the realities of charitable sectors. When the Government announced its £750 million package for the charity sector, its focus was on community organisations. Many ADCH members provide support for their communities through animal care and outreach. The Minister for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport also said charities that address loneliness should also be prioritised. Many animal welfare charities tackle loneliness through contact with animals, providing comfort to isolated members of society.

ADCH would welcome clearer insight into the decision-making processes for these grants to prevent charities from feeling disenfranchised unintentionally for Government support.

Guidance

Like many organisations in the current situation, ADCH members are concerned about the future and uncertain about the present. They need clear, sustained and timely information and guidance to navigate the crisis as best they can, protecting their organisations from closure and ensuring the welfare of animals. This requirement will not end when people return to offices and schools reopen – an open dialogue between rescue charities and Government is going to be essential long-term as the pressures on animal charities change.

One member commented that they needed, 'clear, concise and accurate information. There is so much confusion around what is permitted.'

ADCH recommends that the Government remains open to responding to comments and enquiries from the animal welfare sector; as it has been thus far; which has been entirely welcome. It urges the Government to consider animal welfare when issuing guidance on lockdown procedures, advice for charities and impact on communities. ADCH encourages the Government to publicise any updates and engage with the sector whenever it requires information or feedback on relevant points; recognising that the financial pressures in particular on rescues are unlikely to diminish soon.