



Government Ministers visit RSPCA hospital on the frontline

Rt Hon Caroline Spelman MP joined by Lord Taylor at Harmsworth

Friday 10 February 2012

The Secretary of State for Defra and the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State were given a first-hand view of the shocking impact of irresponsible dog ownership, during a tour of an RSPCA animal hospital.

Rt Hon Caroline Spelman MP was joined yesterday (9.2.12) by Lord Taylor of Holbeach CBE at the Harmsworth Animal Hospital, in north London, where they met hospital director David Grant and new RSPCA chief executive Gavin Grant* for a tour of the facility.



Staff at the Harmsworth Animal Hospital regularly work around the clock, treating dogs that have suffered as a direct result of irresponsible ownership, either through deliberate cruelty, neglect or from attacks by other dogs not under proper control. Last year vets at Harmsworth treated 285 dogs for fighting injuries, compared to 258 in 2010, showing an already series problem is escalating further.

The government ministers saw for themselves some of the animals being treated at the hospital during their tour.



Hospital director David Grant said: "Since I started working here 25 years ago I've always been amazed by some of the appalling cases of cruelty and neglect I've come across, but I would say the problem of irresponsible ownership is as bad now as I have ever seen.

"I've treated dogs that have been stabbed, kicked, punched, and burned with cigarettes. I even recently had to operate on a dog that had been smashed in the face with a glass bottle,

not to mention thousands of innocent animals that have been attacked by other dogs which have been deliberately used as weapons by their owners.

"I think it is vital that to find the solution the politicians need to understand the problem. I sincerely hope by showing them what we deal with here, the Secretary of State and Minister were able to see for themselves the often appalling impact irresponsible dog ownership can have on animal welfare."

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Notes to editors



* The RSPCA's new chief executive Gavin Grant yesterday sent the following message to all of the charity's staff, trustees and branches, outlining his call on the need for a dog registration scheme, and the failure to create such a scheme as one of the reasons for the failure of the Dangerous Dogs Act.

"Today (9.2.12) we brought Caroline Spelman, the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs face to face with the realities of irresponsible dog ownership.

"She and I, along with her Minister of State Lord Taylor were taken around our Harmsworth hospital in East London. Our excellent Hospital Director, David Grant and his staff talked about the daily reality of horrific cases of dog fighting, attacks on other pets and wildlife, and the sheer neglect of "mankind's best friend". We then saw the pathetic state of these dogs for ourselves.

"25 years ago the UK Government scrapped the dog licence. At a stroke they relegated the status of dogs below cars and TVs. 22 years ago they introduced the Dangerous Dogs Act. It was a doomed attempt to stop dog fighting and attacks. It failed because they refused our calls for a registration system to hold owners to account, promote neutering, challenge impulse buying and provide resources to enforce the law and promote dog welfare.

"Since then we, other rescue charities, young children, frail adults and our country's dogs have been left to pay the price of irresponsible ownership. Well, enough is enough.

"Finally the UK's Coalition Government is starting to listen. They seem to be moving towards requiring micro chipping and a database to identify dogs in England. That has been at the heart of our demands for 25 years It will be a start but it's still not enough. David and I made sure the Ministers heard that message loud and clear. We are at a crucial moment for all our dogs. Now we must redouble our efforts for their sake.

"And in the National Assembly for Wales yesterday there was a very positive debate on the issue of the welfare of dogs and dangerous dogs. It is clear that there is cross party support for legislation to introduce microchipping for all dogs, which is very welcome news, although we would caution that any such measures must include an annual registration. The Minister too responded very positively to the need for improved dog controls and we look forward to working with the Welsh Government on the development of this legislation.

"Working alongside our sister charities and friends in the Police, Local Government, veterinary profession and wider society we must get a real system of dog registration in both England and in Wales. Thank-you for all you do to help dogs and to challenge irresponsible owners, unprincipled breeders and the sheer evil of dog fighters and animal baiters. We are close to righting a wrong that has been a stain on a nation of so called "animal lovers" for 25 years. Let's finish the job."

Gavin Grant, RSPCA chief executive, 9 February 2012

Photographs from yesterday's Ministerial visit to RSPCA Harmsworth Animal Hospital are available upon request by contacting the press office on 0300 123 0244 or press@rspca.org.uk

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