



**Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of Vetlife  
held on 17 July 2017 at 14:00 at BVA, London W1**

**PRESENT:**

There were 7 Vetlife members present.

**1. Apologies for absence**

Apologies for absence had been received from 6 Vetlife members.

**2. Pre Notified Additional General Business**

There were no items of additional general business.

**3. Conflicts of Interest**

No new conflicts of interest arising.

**4. Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on 13 July 2016**

The approval of the Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on 13 July 2016 was proposed by Graham Dick and seconded by Elaine Garvican and unanimously agreed. The Minutes were duly signed as a correct record.

The Chair then addressed the meeting:

Vetlife's origins go back to 1919 when one of its predecessors the Victoria Veterinary Benevolent Fund was set up to primarily help those in our profession who needed financial help. More recently we were known as the Veterinary Benevolent Fund and now as Vetlife. Although the name has changed over the years, The charity remains very much focused on what it was originally set out to achieve, namely to look after those less fortunate individuals and their families within our profession.

And although the emphasis of that care has shifted away from financial support, to mental wellbeing, it is still the people who are central to everything Vetlife does and is. I was at a Recent Graduate Reunion last year and one of the delegates asked the question as to whether "that fear" she still felt, a year after qualifying when the phone rang ever disappeared with time. On a positive note, that young graduate felt comfortable in raising the subject and those around her were very supporting. I'm not sure a recent graduate 10 years ago would have felt comfortable voicing that opinion, nor am I sure her classmates would have been as supportive back then. There ensued a lengthy discussion about the worries and stresses young graduates are experiencing, with more senior members of our profession also confessing to find some situations very stressful.

I hear, and I guess you do too, those types of comments and discussions and you would have to have been living on the moon not to have heard or read something about mental wellbeing, mentoring or resilience in the veterinary press. I'm convinced those who are active in our profession today are faced with a lot more stress that I was when I qualified, when, rightly or wrongly, I worked on the basis of 'doing my best'. Sadly, whether those pressures are internal or external, we are in different times. Last year there were 32,000 visits to the Vetlife website and Helpline received a total of 1,285 contacts, of which 421 were over the phone and 856 were received via email. We have

seen a significant move towards email communication, with those percentages being reversed as recently as in 2014 when there was a total of only 370 contacts, 237 of which were by phone and 133 via email.

Although helping individuals and practices copes with issues concerning mental health occupies the majority of Vetlife's personnel, the charity still plays a major role in helping those less fortunate where their finances are concerned. Last year the charity helped beneficiaries to the tune of £116,772 in regular grants and £27,995 as one-off special gifts, usually at Christmas time.

The beneficiaries are one side of the equation, Vetlife personnel are on the other. And without the tremendous amount of dedication and work put in by both the volunteers and here in the office at BVA, that equation wouldn't balance!

Here in the office there have been significant changes, Sabrina is back from maternity leave which means we have had to say goodbye to Fionualla who left at the end of last month. She was heading back to Ireland to attend a wedding and then plans to follow her heart, pursuing a career in acting, singing and teaching singing, mainly opera. We also said farewell to Vanessa who was regarded by many as central to Vetlife in that she played a pivotal role between beneficiaries and Vetlife personnel. I am delighted that we have two new members of the team here at Mansfield St. Joanna Driver, who has taken over from Vanessa as Administration Manager and Eleanor Patterson, Marketing assistant whom we share with the BVA and the AWF. Ellie's expertise lies in marketing and she has, in her short time here, already made her mark. Joanna, has a law degree and brings with her experience from working for other charities. In the short time she has been with Vetlife she has impressed the Board with her quiet efficiency. With all this new blood here in the building I mustn't forget Derek, freshly returned from Wimbledon, where he reached the semi-final! As company secretary, Derek is our umpire and linesman in one; Vetlife and in particular the Board look to his guidance on all matters, Articles, Memorandum and legal related.

This year we witnessed a change to the way in which Vetlife offers its Health Support and before lunch I had the pleasure of presenting Rory, Rory O'Connor with a Certificate of Appreciation for all the support he has provided, over so many years: because of the confidential nature of his work, my guess is we will never fully appreciate the number of individuals and practices that have benefitted from his expertise. The decision to move to a new provider was prompted by the exponential demands on the service and the overwhelming desire to keep ahead of that demand. It was a decision the Trustees took some time ago, indeed when John Moffitt was in the chair; such was the significance of the move, the transition didn't take place until May this year, once we were comfortable to take that step; the last thing we wanted was for those requiring the service, to be adversely affected. I know it is wrong to single out individual Trustees, but I believe I speak on behalf of my fellow Trustees when I single out Bill Mavir and Katie Moore and thank them on behalf of all involved in Vetlife for the tremendous amount of effort and time they both put into this project.

Speaking of my fellow Trustees, there will be a significant number of fresh faces around the table going forward, following this AGM.

The reason the Board will be so new, after today is that we have had a number of changes to the current Board during the last 12 months. A notable one I would like to bring to your attention is that, because Rosie has taken a more hands-on role within Helpline as Helpline Manager, she resigned from the Board at the beginning of this calendar year. The task of ensuring Helpline runs as smoothly as it does, it being one of the major portals into Vetlife is complex, and time consuming, hence the Trustees decision to appoint a manager to oversee it. In addition to that role, Rosie continues to be outward facing in delivering talks, writing and reviewing articles, writing and delivering training and much more. Whereas many in our profession regard Rosie as the public face of Vetlife, at the last count there were 46 Helpline volunteers, some of whom are here today, who keep themselves very much under the radar. Our sincere thanks to all those who are prepared to give so much back to our profession. A couple of the Helpline Volunteers did point out to me recently that in the past there was a Helpline Chairman, elected every three years by the Helpline volunteers and that this post is separate from the Trustee who reports to the Board on

Helpline matters. Rosie was the last individual to hold this post. The election of a Helpline Chairman is documented under the *Vet Helpline Terms of Reference* as opposed to the Articles, and one of the tasks we have set ourselves as a Board is to review all such documents, to ensure we have the best structure going forward. With that in mind we will be consulting with others where appropriate, for their views and guidance.

During the year the Board underwent a Governance Review. The results of that review were, in the main, very gratifying, but not surprisingly there were areas highlighted that need to be addressed.

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I really wanted to stress the importance of the people who make Vetlife what it is, in terms of their commitment and willingness to give freely of their time, but we are only able to do what we do because of the generosity of those who support us financially. Our income comes primarily from a small number of sources. From our members and significant donations from both the Royal College and the VDS. We used to enjoy a significant income from those VDS members who were given the option, when they completed their annual PI insurance renewal forms, of donating to Vetlife, but with the continuing consolidation of our profession we have seen a significant drop in that annual amount. I know that Graham has the task in hand. The other source of income comes from our investments, held and managed by UBS. We are very grateful to them for hitting agreed targets for us each year and for providing us with physical space to hold some of our meetings.

They have in fact very kindly offered us space for our Strategy Meeting, to be held on September 17<sup>th</sup> Although our strategic objectives up to 2020 were agreed by the Board not so long ago, we are living in rapidly changing times; that reality, plus the fact that going forward from today, the Board will comprise of 40% new Trustees, all bringing with them their own unique sets of talents, knowledge and enthusiasm, we thought it a wise move to re-look at those strategic objectives.

For this section of our AGM I set myself the task of talking about people, for the simple reason it is the people that make Vetlife such a vital piece of the jigsaw that contributes to the picture that is our profession, a profession that all of us are immensely proud of, and one that has given us all so much. Maybe that's why so many are keen to put so much back.

I say task, but the decision to put people at the centre of this address has made it an easy one, because there is so much more I could say in praise of Vetlife people. I have tried to provide you with a flavor of what has happened over the last 12 months and to share with you some of the thoughts the Trustees have for the future. There is so much more both in the Annual report and Accounts which I hope you have read, as I am going to be asking you very shortly to adopt them!

Very shortly we shall be publishing Vetlife's annual review which will provide you with additional information in a succinct fashion.

Thank you for your attention and on behalf of the other trustees and the team here at Mansfield St. and our beneficiaries, a very big thanks for all you do for Vetlife.

#### **5. Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 December 2016**

The adoption of the Annual Report and Accounts for 2016 was proposed by Bill Mavir, seconded by Graham Dick and unanimously agreed.

#### **6. Election of 8 Members of the Fund to serve on the Board of Directors**

The Chair announced that the 8 vacancies had received 7 applications and therefore elections would not be held this year. Directors that had been elected by the Members of the Fund were Geoff Little, Graham Dick, Elaine Garvican, Neil Smith, Adrian Pratt, Sarah Brown and Patricia Colville. Adoption of Directors proposed by Ewan McNeill and seconded by Richard Killen and unanimously agreed.

**7. Appointment of Auditors and authorisation of Board of Directors to determine their remuneration**

The re-appointment of Buzzacott LLP was unanimously agreed. The Board of Directors was authorised to determine the Auditors' remuneration.

**8.Any General Business**

There being no further business, the President thanked all those present for attending and declared the meeting closed.