



**Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of Vetlife
held on 8 September 2021 at 12:00 via zoom**

PRESENT:

5 Vetlife members confirmed their attendance and 9 Vetlife Trustees.

1. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence had been received from Danny Chambers, Nichola Saunders, Duncan Berkshire, Lydia Brown, Leslie Kirkbride, John Cox, Julie Gibson

2. Pre- Notified Additional General Business

There were no items of additional general business.

3. Conflicts of Interest

No new conflicts of interest were declared.

4. Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on 11 November 2020

The approval of the Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on 11 November 2020 was proposed by Ewan McNeill and seconded by Adrian Nelson-Pratt and unanimously agreed. The Minutes were duly signed as a correct record.

The Chair then addressed the meeting:

Preparing for today I found myself looking at the Certificate of Incorporation of what was then the Victoria Veterinary Benevolent Fund, and, most poignantly in relation to our present environment, at its date of 6th February 1919.

I noticed that date, not for its legal significance, but for the historic circumstances then faced globally by society in general, and of course by vets and their families. To the savage tragedy of the "war to end all wars" had just been added the insidious, but yet more lethal impact, of the influenza virus, spuriously later known as the "Spanish 'flu", which was to account for over 50 million early deaths worldwide. With no national health system yet established and those without private means still subject to archaic "Poor Laws", the veterinary profession, like many other professions, sought then as now to look after its own in time of need.

Pictures surviving from that era show hospital beds filled with 'flu patients uncannily akin to those witnessed during the worst times of Covid; and of the general populace wearing rudimentary face masks as their only modicum of protection against contracting what was for so many a fatal respiratory disease.

We are now a century on from the final throws of that pandemic and thankfully we do now have a form of welfare state. But the challenges of the last years, and the accompanying pressures placed upon those caring for animals of every sort, have shown how important it is that we as a veterinary family continue to work to support each other in time of need.

2020 saw nearly 4,000 contacts to Vetlife Helpline, 190 referrals for further mental health support through our Vetlife Health Support and over £100,000 issued to assist vets and their dependents by our Vetlife Financial Support service. The half-year figures for this year indicate that these numbers are unlikely to decrease in 2021. Clearly there is a continued need for Vetlife and the hard work both of its dedicated staff and its equally dedicated volunteers.

But as demand for assistance grows, so too does the need to maintain and update the structures that underpin our charity. Necessary restrictions in person to person interactions should not - and have not - prevented the charity moving forward with the necessary oversight, training and governance processes that are rightly expected from such an organisation in today's environment. Our volunteers can be assured that they are correctly supported and underpinned in the wonderful work they do.

Nor should our charity stand still as it adapts to changes in the community in which it operates. In the past year, whilst continuing to provide the core Vetlife services of Financial Support, Helpline and Health Support:-

- we have provided an in-depth critique of possible impacts on veterinary wellbeing of changes proposed by the RCVS Legislation Working Party in its legislative review;*
- we have increased our social media presence and raised awareness of our activities amongst donors and those in possible need of our assistance during what have been uniquely testing times for anyone tending to the health and wellbeing of animals;*
- we have additionally extended the reach of our Helpline services to offer support to Irish colleagues through association with the Irish Veterinary Benevolent Fund;*
- we have recognised the need to establish even stronger relations with our invaluable donor support base by enhancing our small compliment of staff with the addition of a Donor Relations Manager to manage this important aspect of our funding; and I would like to introduce you all to Emma Helbert who has joined us in this role only last week;*
- we are currently looking to provide additional support to manage the increasing demands on our Helpline administration;*
- and, for the first time in nearly 14 years, we are undertaking a full review of our own Memorandum and Articles of Association to ensure the charity we now call Vetlife reflects the immense changes that have taken place in the veterinary community since that original 1919 certificate; and that it is fit for purpose for the decade in which we operate.*

Any substantive revision of the Articles of the charity, and of its funds of which we are custodians, will necessarily be subject to careful scrutiny by the Board of Trustees, the membership and of course to approval by the Charity Commission. Outline proposals are currently with our legal advisors, but it is my hope that we will, in the relatively near future,

be able to seek the membership's consideration of a fully updated and sustainable revised set of Articles for the Charity. These will seek, amongst other things, to recognise the increasingly valued contribution of the veterinary nursing profession to our veterinary community by enabling them to register and participate as full members of Vetlife, including through nomination for election to the Board of Trustees. Additionally, we will also consign the venerable name of "The Veterinary Benevolent Fund" to the archives to join those of the past by including a definitive change of registered name of the charity to become truly that of "Vetlife".

Change is often said to be at the heart of any therapeutic relationship, but for a charity such as ours change is also both constant and inevitable. As we look forward to a hopefully brightening light at the end of the Covid tunnel, my thanks go to my fellow trustees, to all the members, volunteers and consultants, and of course to the wonderful core body of staff who have willingly adapted to current circumstances and kept the charity functioning and responsive to the ever-changing needs of those in the veterinary community we serve. Together we will ensure that Vetlife continues to make a difference for the many who may turn to us for help - now and in the future.

5. Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 December 2020

The adoption of the Annual Report and Accounts for 2020 was proposed by Paul Freeman, seconded by Richard Killen and unanimously agreed.

6. Confirmation of the Election of Two Members of the Fund to serve on the Board of Trustees

The Chair announced that the two vacancies had received three applications. Trustees that had been elected by the Members of the Fund were Danny Chambers and Paul Horwood.

The adoption of Trustees was unanimously agreed.

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

The re-appointment of Buzzacott LLP was proposed by Bill Mavir, seconded by Geoff Little and unanimously agreed. The Board of Trustees was authorised to determine the Auditors' remuneration.

8. Any General Business

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