

Helping the RSPCA as a branch trustee: branch factsheet

RSPCA local branches are independent charities in their own right, although they are governed by the RSPCA Rules for Branches: <http://www.rspca-cambridge.org.uk/rules.pdf>

Each branch is run by a committee of a minimum of 7 and maximum of 14 trustees.

Trustees may be appointed in either of two ways:

- 1) By annual ballot of the branch members at an AGM.
- 2) Co-option during the year by vote of the current branch trustees.

Only adult RSPCA members of at least 3 months standing are eligible to stand for election at an AGM, but co-optees are not required to be members, and we often use this as a way for interested people to get some experience of what it involves.

The basic duty of branch trustees is to attend monthly committee meetings to make decisions about the management of the branch. However many trustees get involved in more hands-on ways, for example with fundraising, rehoming animals and running branch activities such as veterinary welfare assistance for animals owned by low income families. Most RSPCA branches have few or no paid staff and branch trustees do a large amount of the practical work in addition to decision-making.

RSPCA Cambridge branch covers a territorial area stretching from Littleport in the North to just South of Royston and from Gamlingay to Newmarket in a West-East direction.

We run a low-cost animal clinic in Cambridge which treats around 4,000 animals each year, and each year we rehome around 200 animals, mostly cases brought in by RSPCA inspectors or as sick or injured strays.

We have an annual turnover of just under £250,000 and are constantly trying to improve in order to provide more services as we feel we are only scratching the surface of the level of need.

The branch has three charity shops, two of which do employ paid managers, and these generate the largest part of our regular income stream.

We are hoping to recruit more people interested in getting involved as branch trustees.

email info@rspca-cambridge.org.uk for more information or just to discuss what's involved, or call in at our charity shop at 61 Burleigh Street on a Sunday afternoon if you'd like a preliminary chat.

The Minimum Animal Welfare Standards for Branches set out what the branch trustees should be aiming to achieve:

1. Animals accepted into branch care

Branches should be able to provide advice or assistance to animals of all species, even if only by referral to specialist organisations.

Animals taken in by the inspectorate, and in need of accommodation, should be seen as having first call on the branch's animal welfare resources. The branch with this responsibility for the animal is the one in whose area the animal is found.

Branches should aim to accept all companion animals offered to them for adoption, although this may not be achievable in the short term.

2. Rehoming

All dogs and cats should be micro-chipped before rehoming in line with current Society policy.

Where an animal is offered for adoption and a pre-home visit is required in accordance with the rules, the potential adopter should initially be contacted within 48 hours and the visit itself should be conducted within a week.

All animals for rehoming should be neutered, in line with current Society policy, (except where there are over-riding veterinary reasons for not doing so). In the case of animals that are too young to be neutered at the time of adoption, a neutering voucher should be issued and the branch should attempt to ensure that it is used.

3. Welfare Neutering

All branches should establish a welfare neutering policy and budget. Support with welfare neutering of their animals should be offered at least to people on the following benefits: income support, working tax credit, housing benefit.

Owners who fit the eligibility criteria should be offered a minimum contribution toward the cost of neutering their animals (suggested to be at least £10 or 10% of their bill).

4. Assistance with Veterinary Treatment

All branches should establish an appropriate veterinary assistance policy and budget. As with welfare neutering, help should be offered at least to people on income support, family credit or housing benefit.

All people asking the RSPCA for assistance and meeting the eligibility criteria should be offered at least a contribution sufficient to ensure that their animal is seen by a veterinary surgeon (i.e. at least the cost of the consultation fee).

At present, most of our assistance with veterinary treatment is done via our animal clinic in Cambridge, which is available to owners on means-tested state benefits or pension. We do our best to help in case of emergency where an owner cannot reach the clinic, but this is limited to help with the cost of a consultation at a private vet. Our clinic is not free, but charges are roughly a third of what a private vet would have to ask.