

OPEN FORUM

Felicity Thomson took the chair and welcomed everybody to the meeting stating that whilst there could not be a formal discussion on the Secretary's resignation any of the members attending the meeting could put questions to Council before the main part of the day.

Martin Ryder asked Council members to stand up and say who they were and how many cattle they had: Felicity Thomson 24: Fiona Miles 45: Mick Oliphant 23: Pat Short quite a few: Di Smith 135: Mervyn Mountjoy 65: Bob Huntley had previously had a herd of 40 but these were now sold: Mary Kay 0: Bernard Stamp 29: Ken Hobbs: 2. George Godber: 4.

Ken Hobbs said that there was a wide spectrum of both large and small herd owners which reflects the Society as a whole. The members present at the meeting probably represented the top 10% of large herd owners in the Society. Mike Bancroft 50 animals: Rod Metcalf 55 etc. The view of the small herd owner was also important.

Mark Bowles felt that Council should meet the members who had taken time out to attend the meeting: Mark Bowles 50: Rod Metcalfe 55: Caroline and Martin Ryder 75: Martin Wilson 18: Gordon Taylor 9: Bill Rushton 20: Paul Froehlich 0: Allison Kirk 150: Bev Rawlings 55 plus 160 dairy: Sally Poole 88: Robert Kirk: 150: Mike Bancroft 261: Clive Taylor 100: Bill Butcher was an overseas judge etc. but previously had had 20: Philippa Laing 100 plus 20 bulls: Alison Bunning 21: Ken Short odd job and chauffeur: Lottie and Ken James 14 – other members arrived after this time.

Caroline Ryder said that the ultimate aim for the majority of members with bigger herds' was to further the breed. She felt that for the past few years however this had not been happening – that was why people were at the meeting today. She asked why the Dexter breed wasn't moving forward – there was no definitive way on moving forward for beef, dual purpose etc. The need was to educate members regardless of herd size.

Ken Hobbs said he felt that what was needed was to get consistency amongst the beef producers but that this was not possible according to the talk given by Professor Bruford at the AGM. He also felt that the big herd owners need to guide the smaller herd owners.

Caroline Ryder said that Dexter beef quality is something that is not the same universally and she didn't see how he could say this. Some people knew how to farm better than others but this didn't mean the larger herds knew how to do it any better.

Mervyn Mountjoy said that Professor Bruford explained that the Dexter is a diverse genetic breed and only by closed breeding could consistency be gained.

Mark Bowles said he was not here to go over this but speaking personally he wanted to ask Council what was going on with regard to administration. Information drips out throughout the year about resignations etc and the upshot now is that the Breed Secretary has resigned. He had not heard anyone speak badly of Yvonne – in fact he hadn't heard a bad word about her except from Council. Council were there to work for the membership.

Rod Metcalf then asked Council members if they were happy with the way it was run.

Felicity Thomson said she did not like the way Council was run. She felt that Council did not have enough contact with members and did not listen and in the end they were servants or the members.

Bob Huntley said he had been on Council since 1999 and had been voted back by the members - he asked why, if the members had no confidence in him, they had voted for him. He also reminded the meeting that it could not discuss anything to do with the Secretary as this is sub judice. He felt that over the last four or five years there had been people deliberately undermining Council members and the personality clashes had been an absolutely disgrace. Certain people's sole attitude had been nothing to do with running the Society but to undermine certain people on Council. He said he was happy to a degree. He was not in favour of 12 member council but 15 – with a greater number there would be more representation.

Rod Metcalfe summed Bob Huntley's view as "happy with way Council is, not looking to make bigger changes just increase the size of Council"

Sally Poole expressed her view that she thought Council was there to run the Society not to argue amongst itself. The Council needed to be professional and should act professionally.

Mary Kay felt that whilst most things with Council were OK some things were not. As this was her first meeting for a year she could not comment on what had happened over previous meetings. She said there was a great room for improvement and she was happy to listen to any constructive advice that might be proffered.

Rob Kirk asked Mary Kay whether she had been happy with the Council over the last four or five years. As she had been on the forefront of Council in the past why had nothing been done before? When he asked her whether there were forces within Council which were not working she replied that there were. Rob Kirk then asked why this had not been sorted out.

Mary said that she did not think that prior to last year there had been too many problems but that there had been a hiccup in the last six months of that period. She felt that the problems had mainly arisen over the last 18 months.

Sally Poole felt that people working on Council should have been able to rise above these sorts of problems.

Ken Hobbs spoke about what he thought of Council and said that he had been asked four years ago by Stuart Tarrant, who was then about to become President of the Society, to take over as Treasurer from him. Ken Hobbs said that whilst he was not an accountant he had had noticed that over the previous three years the Society had made a loss. Having looked at the figures he managed to get the accounts on to a slight profit and used Gift Aid donations which raised £5,000. He also pointed out that at an EGM he was called to task to say that fees etc. were too high and he had felt undermined by questions on his handling of matters.

Bill Butcher said that members queried why Council members wished to be in office if they did not have cattle. This he explained was not intended as a slight but it was something that people asked.

Bernard Stamp explained that he thought the meeting had lost sight of what was important here and why people were on Council in the first place – they were appointed to run the Dexter Society on behalf of all the members to the best of their ability. Bernard said he was also quite convinced that members would not approve of the present infighting and behaviour. He said that the Society had an excellent Secretary whom the membership like and respect. The Council he felt would lose all credibility if they lost her.

Mervyn Mountjoy said that he was not happy with the way Council was being run because it did not seem to know how it should function. The Chairman is responsible for running meetings and to take full account of what is happening on a day to day basis between Council members and the Secretary. At present Council members contact the Secretary directly.

Rod Metcalf asked Mervyn how he would change this and he said that a strong chairman was needed together with Council members acting in a disciplined way. He felt that the rules and changes to the Articles and Memorandum were needed.

Fiona Miles said she felt that a system needed to be set up which would actually protect the secretary. In effect she had 12 bosses and no one could work in this way. A line manager in effect would be needed as liaison between Council and the Secretary

Martin Ryder said he agreed with this statement. The secretary should administer the Society and deal with Society business. A President would be appointed and other Council members should contact the office through the Chairman or Line Manager.

Rod Metcalf asked why people weren't encouraged to come forward. Clive Taylor reiterated this point saying that there was only an advertisement in the bulletin each year. Felicity Thomson replied that this was how it had been done every year.

Caroline Ryder said that she totally disagreed with increasing the Council to 15 because if 12 couldn't agree then 15 wouldn't. All the in-fighting did not allow the Society to move forward. She said that the same had been true when she was on Council. She felt that she had not been able to have an opinion. If you did not agree with Council you were in the wrong. The membership needed to know why there was a turnover of Secretaries – was it because Council was dysfunctional? No one wanted to join Council because anyone with enthusiasm and fresh ideas would not fit in with the Master Plan. She felt Council had acted like playground bullies and whilst she agreed that this was personal other people were also coming out of the woodwork to agree. She had no confidence in the Council running the Society or taking it forward in any direction. The Society needed to move forward and educate members wherever possible.

Felicity Thomson asked that all members should air their views without bringing personal issues in.

Alison Kirk said that if bullying and harassment had taken place in the DCS office then it must be taken seriously and she had information on this topic should it be of use

Mark Bowles felt that the Minutes on the DCS website were much abbreviated and in those of the 18th July apologies had been recorded from Ted Neal. That meeting also opened with Sue Bancroft, as Chair, appealing for Council to put aside its personal issues and work as a team. Mark said he would like to ask what happened about the various resignations of Council Members e.g. Mick Oliphant, Bernard Stamp and Ted Neal. Ted Neal had apparently resigned after the Council Meeting at the AGM in 2006 but was attending meetings as a Council member? These issues are talked about outside of Council but the membership does not know what is going on. The membership wanted to know what did happen after the AGM but only Council knew. Where does the Society go from here?

Felicity Thomson said that it was her personal opinion that the Council stand down and then everything start up again afresh.

Rob Kirk asked if the way forward was a Steering Committee in the interim.

Bill Osborne pointed out that there is a system called SKYPE on which you can have conference calls on and this would reduce the travelling for Council members particularly during the winter. He was concerned about Council costs and felt that this would be a way forward to save Society money.

Ken Hobbs said he wanted to see the Society go forward. He was a small herd owner and he thought that people with a few animals should have as much say as the larger herd owners. He felt that as a small herd owner this is what he was offering.

Clive Taylor asked what had happened between Ted Neal and Ken Hobbs over the change in Treasurer.

Ken Hobbs explained that Ted was a trained accountant and he had wanted to know why Ken was Treasurer as he was only a farmer. It was agreed therefore that Ted Neal take over as treasurer.

Caroline Ryder pointed out that as Ted Neal was not at the meeting it could not really say what his opinion of Ken's suitability as treasurer was.

Rod Metcalf asked Ken Hobbs if he was happy with the way Council was running and what would he do to change it to which Ken Hobbs replied that he was happy with all his compatriots and wanted the Society to go forward in every way it could.

Bob Huntley said he felt he had tried to take the Society forward but on two counts – attempting to get DNA brought in and compulsory bull registrations were both talked down.

Martin Wilson said it seemed that Council were too busy fighting between each other and could not resolve any issues.

Bob Huntley said he hoped he had done the best for the members but that there did seem to be too many personal agendas.

Paul Froehlich pointed out he felt Bob Huntley had exactly the same problem – a personal agenda. Bob had been in a room with 12 people and he did not get his own way.

Martin Ryder felt there needed to be a sea change. The present system was not working. He felt the Society should change the way it operated and have a secretary in charge of administration, a President to run between Secretary and Council. Key targets should be set which the members want to see carried out. A policy should be written for this and then the Society can move forward. The Society needed to find out what members wanted and act upon it in a business like manner.

The majority of members present agreed with this idea with both short and long term objectives being set.

Robert Kirk said that when he was on Council he had been told there would be more communication but clearly things had not progressed.

George Godber said he had heard a lot of talk at the meeting about disagreements within Council and he agreed that there had been. When he came on Council his idea was to work for 1200 plus members not just one or two individuals with their own agendas. Unfortunately some of these people were on Council. He asked the meeting what they would do if people on Council did things that they thought were morally wrong?

A lengthy discussion took place about various situations which had arisen and which George Godber had felt strongly about.

Mark Bowles said he felt that perhaps George Godber was getting towards what the members needed to know. At the end of the day he wanted to walk about knowing that things had been achieved.

Other members felt that no progress was being made and that the meeting was becoming a waste of time. Rod Metcalf however felt that the meeting was working towards a solution and asked everyone not to give up just yet.

Di Smith reminded the meeting that they needed to think about the fact that the Society had no secretary, Elaine the clerk was in the office not knowing what was happening and everyone was talking about other matters. Di Smith asked whether the membership thought anyone would want the Secretary's job given the past history. She said that the whole of Council should stand down, a steering committee be appointed and then beg Yvonne Froehlich to come back.

Robert Kirk: Seconded this.

Phillipa Laing said she had been going to make the same point but also said that we needed to keep reminding Council members that they are the trustees of the Society acting on behalf of the members. There are a lot of rules and regulations relating to this and all Council members should read and learn and abide by them more diligently. She asked whether Council could possibly bury all the hatchets and try and work together.

Fiona Miles said she did not believe in blame culture. Everyone had to work together and look at the bigger picture. She felt it important that the Society did not run about and point the finger. She felt passionate about the Dexter and that is why she was on Council. She said she would do to the best of her ability and judgement whatever she could for the Society. She had been concerned that the membership was ambivalent about matters but this meeting had proved her wrong and hopefully things could go forward. It was a collective responsibility and she did not want to blame any one person. The need was to look to the future.

Bernard Stamp said he felt that the biggest problem when new Council members joined was that they do not fulfil their new roles and responsibilities to enable the breed to go forward. Whilst the Council needed new members he felt that it was difficult when they did not complete the tasks they had undertaken.

Rod Metcalf said that whilst this may or may not be true and when he had been on Council it was true – the Society needed to take a new look at the system because it does not work.

Rod Metcalf thought that a smaller number with specific targets would be a better way forward.

Mark Bowles added that he thought giving individual people individual jobs put a lot of pressure on them – it needed to be more of a team effort.

Mick Oliphant said that he agreed with a lot of what had been said previously and that the procedure outlined above for dealing with the Secretary through an intermediary was a good one. He dealt with the new members and rang them up to see if they had any questions or problems and then spoke to the office. The office also rang him about queries and he thought that this had worked very well. He also felt that everyone who said they would do something did it. He also felt more input from members was important because Council members did not know everything. Whilst he acknowledged Council had failed on some things he also felt that some things had been done well. He felt it was how to deal with the in-fighting that was the real problem. He asked how the Society would deal with matters if they got rid of everyone on Council. If a Steering Committee or another way was better then he would walk away for the good of the Society.

Martin Wilson said Mick Oliphant still hadn't said where he felt the Council was going wrong. Robert Kirk asked how he would stop the in-fighting and bullying.

Mick Oliphant said that an answer to how we can improve the situation would be for everything to undertake the jobs they were given and complete them. He pointed out that Ann Gates had sent a letter in with some good points in it and he had no problem in accepting these ideas.

George Godber said he felt that if a Steering Committee were to be set up the legality of this would have to be looked into in view of the Society being a charity. He was not sure that the Society could take this step at the present time.

Robert Kirk said the Council were a group of people who were not doing the Society any good.

Bob Huntley told the meeting that he dealt with registrations and both he and Fiona Miles had discussed various matters relating to this and he had also involved Philippa Laing for her views. These matters were then brought back to Council to be discussed. This was done on a regular basis.

Rod Metcalf said more needed to be known about how the Council operates.

Mick Oliphant pointed out that Jacqui Parkes had written in to say that there should be Regional Representation on Council. This had been brought to the last Council meeting and would be used as a way forward.

Mary Kay advised that Council used to have a Group Co-ordinator who contacted Groups prior to Council and would then bring back any comments to the next meeting.

Caroline Ryder said that the Groups idea was a good one and she suggested the possibility of partial representation on Council from the Groups.

Michael Wilson said the immediate step was to sort out the present Council. He felt that any EGM would discuss the situation and the whole of Council would be thrown off then so why did members not step down now – a solution needed to be found the present situation was just not working.

Bill Osborne reiterated his idea about using conference calls for some of the Council meetings and thought this would enable more people to feel they could stand for election.

George Godber pointed out that under Charity Commission law a conference call meeting cannot make any abiding decisions.

Fiona Miles stated that if the Society did not get the administration done over the next three months then it would be bankrupt. The herd returns, membership forms etc. needed to be

sent out in order for funds to come in. There was only one person who could do this and it needed to be discussed now.

Pat Short said she agreed with Fiona totally and went on to say that what a wonderful secretary the Society had, she was very popular and had done lots of work to progress the Society. She pointed out that one or two hiccups had arisen recently and the members present were obviously getting a picture of this. She said that the Council had had their meetings, members came from all walks of life and all had different opinions and problems would arise whoever was on Council. The Society needed a new set of Rules and targets to move forward and to give a guideline for the future. She was sorry the present situation had happened. She felt that perhaps the Secretary had taken on too much in her efforts to help the Society and this had caused her to be under a lot of pressure.

Di Smith said that now we were getting to the point. The Council are employers they needed to sort the situation about. Elaine the clerk in the office was a very worried person about her present situation and we are not being good employers at the moment.

Paul Froehlich was asked if his wife would be prepared to come back in the short term and help the Society if Council stood down and someone else took over.

Paul Froehlich replied that whether or not Council stood down was irrelevant. He felt that Yvonne just wanted to walk away and it was getting harder for her to come back with each passing day. He said she would not come back as Breed Secretary. He said that three-quarters of Council said that the present situation is not working but then they ask to be able to sort it out. He pointed out that Mick Oliphant had said people should stick to what they said they were going to, if that were the case then 7 members of Council would not be here because over a period of time they had all resigned. Yvonne however has resigned and that meant resigned. As far as coming back he felt that personally and he could not speak for Yvonne, he would love to see her come back in the short term and sort it out because that would be how Yvonne would want to leave it. She had made a lot of friends and she was unhappy about the situation. If Council had asked her last week it would have been easier but with each day that passed it got harder. Yvonne had had three breed societies ring her up already offering her interviews and this is the type of job she loves. They had to get on with their lives. It was up to Council to speak to her.

Felicity Thomson then said that Yvonne's resignation could not be discussed any further due to legal reasons.

Mark Bowles pointed out that whilst Council might not want to discuss it the membership did.

A GENERAL DISCUSSION TOOK PLACE AMONGST THE MEMBERS WHICH WAS NOT MINUTED

Mervyn Mountjoy suggested that the Secretary deals with the administration and Council members contact her via the President. He felt that contacting the Secretary directly over matters pertaining to the AGM for example were not the correct way for things to be handled. The problems which had arisen should and could have been sorted out differently.

Martin Wilson said that Council should resign – come the EGM they would be gone anyway as that was the least an EGM would do.

Rod Metcalf said that this would not resolve the problem with the secretary. He felt that the membership had to persuade Council to make some decisions which would enable Yvonne to stay in either a temporary or preferably a permanent capacity. He felt that the way forward was for Council to stay in place, a small steering group be attached to it which would have the immediate authority to speak to Yvonne and negotiate the best deal to keep her. The Steering Committee would then talk about how Council could move forward and suggest any changes required and a series of proposals would be brought to an EGM.

Robert Kirk said that this was not a way forward because Yvonne could not work with these people and he asked if Council were prepared to sign en masse.

Felicity Thomson felt that if the breed were to move forward then Council should resign.

Ken Hobbs queried the legality of such a decision and would the Society be breaking Charity Commission rules or Company law.

Clive Taylor said that only two people needed to stay on as directors

Ken Hobbs said that there was a need to make sure that if everybody resigned there would be no come back on individuals as trustees.

Robert Kirk asked if the membership could ascertain whether as a group Council were going to stand down or was there a need for a vote of no confidence.

Ken Hobbs raised the question of Council disbanding and then people standing again for re-election. If some of the present Council got voted on again would another EGM have to be called to vote these people off?

Robert Kirk said that the members knew what had been going on at Council but Mary Kay said that whilst she understood what he was saying about the membership knowing, she felt that they did not fully know the whole position and it was a difficult position to be in.

Mick Oliphant pointed out that he was on the blacklist and he had never said a word to Yvonne which could have been taken as criticism.

Felicity Thomson summed up the situation that the members felt the Council were dysfunctional and should resign en masse or be voted off at an EGM.

Robert Kirk proposed that the Council be disbanded and a Steering Committee be set up. He felt Council should do the honourable thing and resign.

Sally Poole felt that the legal aspects needed to be looked into and to find out what the ramifications would be if the membership gave Council a vote of no confidence.

Rod Metcalfe suggested an interim period to try and persuade Yvonne to say because this needed to be done immediately, waiting for an EGM would take too long. He proposed Council stay in place but reiterated his suggestion that the steering committee talk to Yvonne and then prepare for an EGM as detailed above.

Di Smith advised that Council do have the power to co-opt three members to join Council and speak to Yvonne whilst other matters get sorted.

Philippa Laing asked how a steering committee would be appointed and Di Smith said that they could be co-opted from people at the meeting.

Alison Kirk said the meeting really needed to get something done.

Pat Short said she would propose Mark Bowles. Di Smith proposed Martin Ryder.

Caroline Ryder said that if this goes ahead then the present Council must not be able to liaise with the office

Di Smith then read out Article 37 of the Constitution which appertained to this part of the meeting.

Di Smith made the suggestion that Council resign en masse and leave a steering committee in charge. The present Council would not be able to stand for re-election for 2 years.

Ken Hobbs said that if everyone agreed to resign en masse he was quite happy to do the same. He asked for a 15 minute break in order that this could be discussed with the Solicitor. Previous advice had been not to discuss certain matters in public and had advised that a Council member plus one other should liaise with the Secretary. This was the Solicitor's advice.

Bill Osborne said he did not disagree with Ken and felt that further advice should be taken but suggested the Charities Commission not the Company Solicitor.

Felicity Thomson proposed taking a 30 minute break while George, Fiona and herself spoke to the Charities Commission.

Robert Kirk also asked them to check on the situation regarding a vote of no confidence and also bringing in a steering committee.

Meeting closed at 11.45 a.m.

Meeting Re-convened at 1.00 p.m.

Fiona Miles reported back that she had spoken to the Charities Commission but they could not help or advise at the present time as they needed everything in writing. She had spoken to the Solicitor that George Godber had spoken to at Needham and James and he was an employment specialist. He had advised that from the employment perspective Yvonne should work out her notice and if at that stage she agreed the Council could offer a temporary situation that would count separately. This would not harm her position if she then made a claim against the Society for constructive dismissal. From the point of view of the charities commission and the Council resigning this could be done but only after it had co-opted three members on. He felt that because the charity couldn't actually continue working unless something was done along these lines or it employed someone before Yvonne left, it would be well advised to take this course of action. He could not however advise on our Constitution.

Fiona suggested that as Felicity had done a brilliant job steering the meeting and she had tried to steer an independent path through all of this could both of them remain together with the Steering Committee to help the Society through this.

Di Smith pointed out she would be happy because she felt that Fiona had behaved independently. She had however found in the constitution that the Society could have three co-opted people as Trustees. Those three could then co-opt anyone else on as they wished to help run things for the time being. Extra members would be needed to enable a quorum.

Ken Hobbs said he was very happy with Fiona Miles to remain but not Felicity Thomson. He felt that Fiona had been the most neutral member of Council. He proposed Martin Ryder, Mark Bowles, Bev Rawlings and Rod Metcalf be co-opted on.

Bev Rawlings said she was not prepared to be co-opted on but would be willing to stand at an election. Robert Kirk said he was prepared to stand in the interim but was not looking to stand for Council. Martin Ryder, Martin Wilson and Rod Metcalf were all prepared to stand in the interim. Mark Bowles was prepared to stand in the interim but under conditions.

Paul Froehlich asked how soon could there be a new election and Felicity Thomson advised that an EGM would have to be called.

The Members then left the meeting at 1.15 p.m.