

The Blue Cross Northiam Public Meeting Minutes

Northiam Public Meeting, 9 March 2010.
Northiam Village Hall, 3pm until 5pm.

Present from The Blue Cross:
Chief Executive Kim Hamilton
Director of External Affairs Steve Goody
Director of Human Resources Rachel Briggs
Head of Communications Debbie Curtis
Senior Press Officer Laura Dobson
Meeting minutes - Natasha Kleanthous

Meeting attendance: c.140 people.

Welcome

Steve Goody welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced The Blue Cross staff present.

Introduction

- Kim Hamilton thanked everyone for coming and explained the reasons behind the Strategic Review which started just over a year ago, in January last year.
- As a relatively new chief executive it was a good opportunity to work with trustees and other executives to see where we were going as an organisation.
- The income projections for 2009 were showing a loss.
- We needed to review our activities as it was very clear that as an organisation we couldn't continue to do everything that we were doing..
- The Blue Cross has got a heritage that's second to none and we have to make sure that the organisation is strong enough that we are still here in another 120 years.
- The Blue Cross 110 years ago was a very different organisation to the one that exists today. Early history was based around horses and helping them through the wars. Obviously that wouldn't apply now and the organisation has had to change with the animal welfare issues.
- Example on the news today of dangerous dogs. We see that directly and the issues we see in the hospitals are very different to what they were 10 or 20 years ago. These issues are things we need to get to grips with. As a responsible charity we have to make sure we meet these needs.
- We looked at everything the organisation does: hospitals, rehoming centres, equine centres, veterinary care fund (VCF) and university professorship. We had to look at everything and see if it was right for The Blue Cross to be there today. We've made some decisions already and some activities we have already stopped. The VCF closed at the end of January and we are withdrawing grants from a number of Welfare Associates at the end of this year.
- The way The Blue Cross has operated in recent years is with three very clear and distinct departments: companion animals, veterinary, equine. That's one of the things

we changed through the Strategic Review to integrate functions more closely together. We have a whole veterinary department but actually we weren't using our vets at adoption centres, we were buying in services from other vets.

- We are trying to introduce a new model of how we deliver our rehoming functions to maximise efficiencies and increase our impact on animal welfare needs.
- We've done a lot of analysis of people who use our services. Who are the people who rehome our animals? Who are the people who use our veterinary services?
- Through the hub and satellite model we can use our rehoming and veterinary services more efficiently. We would have an integrated hub that can take in the animals, treat them by our own vets and be supported by our satellites that are much smaller that can rehome the animals. We think this model will give us the greatest impact on animal welfare.
- As part of the Strategic Review we looked at all of the centres we have now and how they would fit into that model. We looked at their location and a huge number of different factors to see where they fit in. That's what led to proposals for Northiam and Felixstowe.
- Both sites need a considerable amount of investment. At Northiam the equine site is not that bad. In terms of small animals, it's not great. For example, we don't have isolation facilities that are really important if an animal comes in with an infectious disease and the kennels are not big enough for certain types of dogs. There are severe limitations.
- To bring Northiam up to the standard that we would say is state of the art is in the region of £2.5 to £3 million. If we are going to be spending that sort of amount should we be spending it in an area where there is a greater need? That is the basis of the proposals.
- We started a dialogue with our staff at the end of January. We've been talking to volunteers and the local community. These views are really important to us as an organisation. We are an honest and responsible organisation that has integrity. We have to do the most important thing by our staff and supporters but most importantly by the animals.
- We do want to hear what you have to say and we are taking that all into account in the evaluation period. What we will be doing is re-evaluating the original proposals. We have heard what the community has said and we are now looking at all the alternatives.
- We are looking at if and how we can maintain a presence in the area. This will take several weeks.
- There are a couple of themes coming through that were discussed in the meeting on 23 February. Apologies for us not being there, we had previous commitments we couldn't change.
- The first question has been about staff and how we treated them. Doing the right thing for the staff has been our priority. We made sure that as the proposals were finalised we came down and spoke to the staff first. We've held at least two one-to-one meetings with staff and it's our absolute priority to make sure we do everything we can for them. Because there's a risk to the staff we have put a freeze on all recruitment so if the proposals go forward there are many job opportunities for them. We've had counsellors on site to support staff if they need it.
- We've had many letters, emails and phone calls about people who say this is nothing to do with animals, all you want is to sell the land. I am here to tell you now categorically

that we have not approached any developers, we have not sold the land, we have not sought planning permission. Any decision on land will be made after a decision on the proposals has been made. That may include selling the site but as a responsible charity we would not do anything that would breach a restricted covenant that exists on the land or anything that would breach charity guidelines. That is not the driver here. The driver is how we can help as many animals as possible.

Questions from the floor.

- Please note names are not included as not all names were given by the person asking the question or heard clearly by the minute taker.

Patron of The Blue Cross

Q) Unfortunately if The Blue Cross Northiam closes, I will no longer be a patron. The question is, you sent out a survey that went in a 10 mile radius of The Blue Cross asking questions about what people thought of the closure.

A) KH - We haven't sent out a survey asking that question

Q) You say you've been looking at this for over a year. Why has it taken you so long to then announce that you may perhaps close Northiam? Also I understood the end of consultation was supposed to be at the beginning of March but now there are things you are looking into. Why are you only looking at them now?

A) KH - It took so long because it's such a big exercise and has to be done properly, with due diligence, it can't be rushed. In terms of consultation, the staff consultation period finished on Friday (March 5). A lot of people are cynical about consultation periods and believe it's just a done deal. But that's not the case. This is the chance for us to say have we got the proposals right and if not, what have we missed? What should we amend?

Q) Consultation is a legal requirement. Staff were told that they were going to have a decision on 5 March, but so many other things seem to have come to light, now all these people are hanging in the balance until when? They still don't even know if they've got a job,

A) KH - The legal requirement is to have a period of a minimum of two weeks. We actually didn't do that, the consultation period was 5-6 weeks. Decisions were never going to be made on March 5. That was when the consultation period closed then there has to be a period of evaluation. Worse case scenario is that it could be end of April. If we can make a decision before then we will. We are very aware of the anxiety of the staff but it has to be done properly.

Q) Have you looked into the possibility that money has been left to you specifically for the upgrade of Northiam?

A) KH - We've looked at all the donations in the area and those that are specific, there are very few specific donations or gifts for specific centres. There haven't been any specific donations for the upgrade of Northiam.

Local resident

Q) Is it right that the nearest centre is Southampton? There is a volunteer service but no centre?

A) KH - In terms of The Blue Cross, yes.

Q) So therefore, the nearest centre is 90 miles away and I think it will be difficult for you to operate The Blue Cross here. You have to have some sort of centre or buildings.

A) KH - We do need to discuss that, if we do exit both the equine and small animal facilities here we wouldn't have anything in the southeast and that's what we're looking at in the evaluation period.

Q) So you might have a centre in the area?

A) KH - These are options we are looking at. Do we keep a presence in the area? If so should it be Northiam? How much should we spend? The proposals we put forward at the end of January are to give us a maximum impact in terms of animal welfare in the country. What we're hearing in the consultation period is perhaps that we need to compromise on that ultimate goal. We do have to change but what we put forward as proposals were the optimum change. The question is how far of a compromise do we make and do we make this so we can retain this presence?

Q) You've got quite a big range of conurbations in this area.

A) KH - Yes but we don't have the magnitude of some of the animal welfare issues.

Local resident

Q) Would it help if we could raise funds - Sir Paul McCartney wrote to you because he wants The Blue Cross to stay in the area.

A) KH - It was a fantastic letter and we have written to him to discuss how he can help. There's a difference between fundraising for the upkeep of a centre and the investment required to completely upgrade it. If Mr McCartney wants to write us a cheque out it would be very welcome.

Q) Would it keep it open?

A) KH - It would be difficult to say no.

Q) That seems a very cynical attitude.

A) SG - While we would be extremely grateful for a substantial cheque what we're not in a position to do is to say categorically that we would stay on this site.

Local resident

Q) The Blue Cross has invested quite a lot of money on the equine side. With the economic climate there's going to be a lot more need for help for the horses. People are abandoning them or unable to keep them. There are good facilities here, we don't want the village to lose it.

A) KH - There is no rehoming of equines through Northiam. It's purely a retirement and rest facility. Rehoming of horses is done through Burford already, that wouldn't change.

Q) Northiam used to rehome.

A) KH - That change to be frank was many years ago.

Q) It was two years ago.

A) SG - The difficulty that The Blue Cross has as does any animal welfare organisation in the 21st century is that we've got a finite financial resource with which we can develop animal welfare. We have to think proactively about where we spend that money to effect the best animal welfare. One of the reasons why we moved away from rehoming animals directly from Northiam two or three years ago is that it became difficult to rehome horses in this geographical area.

Q) Wasn't the reason for the change a lack of riding areas locally?

A) This may have been part of the reason but the main reason was that it was difficult to rehome horses.

Volunteer

Q) Wouldn't it put pressure on the other centres if you moved the retired horses?

A) KH - The retired horses that are here would go to either Rolleston or Burford where there are more than enough facilities. There are approx 120 acres at Burford that are not being used at the moment, just being maintained, that could be used.

Chairman of Beckley Parish Council

Q) You have a piece of land that's owned by The Blue Cross which I believe was given by a Mrs Rosemary Barraclough as a covenant. I have a letter from The Blue Cross saying it would be held in perpetuity. Can you give clarity about situation of covenanted land?

A) KH - We have a number of plots of land that have covenants attached to them. As a responsible charity we would abide by those covenants, there's nothing we would do to breach those.

Q) But doesn't it beg the question that you may move out of an area where you have land?

A) KH - We have individual plots of land scattered around the country now where we don't have a presence.

Q) We're talking about the land here not about other areas. People sitting here today would like to know about this land. Have you investigated the rest of the land in Northiam? How much of this has restricted covenants on it?

A) KH - The land in Northiam which has restricted covenant is off the top of my head probably less than 10 per cent.

Q) It's no surprise that the southeast local plan goes out in 2011. The proposal in the southeast is to build some 6000 houses and will be set for the next 25 years. It must be of interest to people that that land is going to become available.

A) KH - We are jumping to a conclusion that that's what we would do with the land if the decision was made to close the centres. We have to make a decision if we will retain land in Northiam or the southeast. We have made no proactive efforts in terms of what we then do. There will be number of options, selling will be one, but that decision won't be made until we get to the point where we decide what we are doing.

Local resident

Q) You've done a valuation of all the sites. What is the valuation for Northiam?

A) KH - Last time we did a section 36 on the site, the value was in the region of £600,000. That has happened since I've been at The Blue Cross.

Q) I'm surprised to hear that the site is rather limited. I would love to see the estimate that says the new kennels will cost £2.5 million. That's an incomprehensible amount of money. The hub and satellite model is all fine and dandy but it leaves no satellite in the southeast. It doesn't make any sense to buy more land when you've got 38 acres in your ownership anyway.

A) KH - In terms of redevelopment, that's how much it's going to cost. We have some pretty high quality staff and we also have a gentleman who is a renowned expert and is consulted by other animal welfare organisations in terms of designing kennels and catteries. We have just refurbished our sites at Southampton and Thirsk. That was

around £1.5 million and that wasn't a full refurbishment like we need at Northiam. The reality is that how much it costs.

Q) You need some competitive quotes.

A) KH - We have to have an estimate of how much something is going to cost to go to the trustees and tell them. After that we would go out to get competitive quotes to see how much it will cost - whether it will be £2.4m, £2.5m or £2.6m - but it will be around that amount.

Q) Given that you've got 38 acres the better route to take would be to have some high profile fundraising rather than selling the land.

A) KH - This is absolutely something we will look at. Selling to developers is not what this is about.

Local resident

Q) You say you haven't approached anybody about selling land. When I rang your Oxford office I was told categorically that you had been approached about selling the land.

A) We have not approached anybody, people constantly approach us. We have residents who live close by who are trying to buy strips of land. We've had people who have come and said "it's terribly sad but if you do close it, as a local resident we'd be interested in buying it."

Q) What about large developers?

A) KH - As far as I know, no developers have contacted us.

Comments from Councillor Martin Mooney

- The area that is occupied by The Blue Cross in Northiam is almost entirely in an area of outstanding natural beauty. It can't be built on.
- The only exception where we would allow building is for affordable housing. We had a situation in Northiam about 10 years ago where affordable housing was proposed. We put it out to you, you didn't like it, and it didn't happen.
- There is a consultation going through about the local development framework plan but the policies that we have in there now will not expire. They will still go on. There is a presentation about this on 24th March at the town hall.

Local resident

Q) Do you believe there's a need for a rescue centre in the southeast?

A) KH - Yes I agree there's a need for facilities in the southeast.

Q) The British Horse Society, World Horse Welfare and RSPCA all agree there's a lack of facilities in the area. If The Blue Cross decided to pull out and that they no longer wanted to support animal welfare in this area would they give consideration to supporting any other organisations that are prepared to come in to take over the centre and run it in exactly the same way that The Blue Cross does?

A) KH - We recognise there's a need and that's what we're looking at now. This option is certainly one we'd consider.

Local resident

Q) Where did you get the figure of £2.5m to build from? I know someone who is building kennels for a lot less - less than £400 per kennel. Do they have gold taps? Plus I spoke to

a gentleman who used to be connected to Denton Homes and he said they have approached you.

A) KH - we have experience of building these facilities and the estimates we have come up with are accurate in my opinion and the opinion of the experts. The reality is these are the costs. No they don't have gold plated taps but we are looking at state of the art facilities. In terms of your friend at Denton Homes I can categorically tell you that I am not aware of anyone from there contacting us about this land and there is nothing on record.

Local resident

Q) It seems that before you consider proposals you should find out what sort of support you are likely to have. You haven't asked local people if they are willing to support you financially.

A) KH - I think we know the overwhelming support from the community we have both here and in Felixstowe but we need to look at where we need to be before we look at how to fund it. We are aware of the support we get in the local areas and yes, there is an element of having to make an assumption. If there is something that The Blue Cross can do to maintain a presence here then this is something we should be doing. This is the next stage.

Q) I have a strong suspicion it's more to do with money than it is looking after animals.

Local resident

Q) I took two dogs from the centre 18 months ago and there was nowhere else anywhere near here that I could have gone. There seems to be a lack of focus on what you're really up to. In this area there are very few places for dogs that I can find. There are a lot of catteries but nowhere for dogs. I know two horse rescue places, one in my own village in dire straits. Isn't it time that all of the organisations put your heads together and said "what are the needs in certain areas, are you covering it or should we?"

On the veterinary side you said you paid a lot of money to vets buying in services but if you had your hubs you'd have your own in-house vets. Whatever happens you're always going to get emergency cases where you're going to need emergency vets. You are lacking focus on what your needs are.

A) KH - We've redefined our core business as a single integrated service delivery which is rehoming, veterinary and equine and support and advice. That's what the hub and satellite model is designed to do.

Q) Do you not think in some areas there's duplication of services and in other areas there's nothing?

A) KH - Absolutely. But animal welfare charities do talk a lot amongst each other. It's something all of the charities are doing - people are having to work together more closely. It's something I'm absolutely advocating and I'm constantly talking to organisations like the RSPCA and Dogs Trust.

Q) Does the figure include veterinary care?

A) KH - No. One of the aspects we are looking at to service animal welfare needs in the southeast is should we have a hospital and if so where should it be?

Q) How you can finance the big hub centres with all the satellites without selling the land? I've heard the land is worth £2.5 million, how has this changed from £600,000?

A) KH - The last evaluation was approximately 600 thousand pounds. In terms of how we are going to finance the hub, we've got a capital plan for 10 years. We've talked about having a roll out of hub and satellite models over a number of years that would need to be funded through fundraising campaigns and reserves.

Q) According to your annual report you're running a loss now and you're going to dive through resources to make the model work?

A) KH - That's not what we're doing. There's a very well thought out plan. It's all part of the strategy. We've had to turn some things off to help the financial situation. We have to change how we deliver our services otherwise we will not be here in 5 or 10 years' time.

Q) You said there was no covenant on the land then it comes out today that there is.

A) KH - Someone asked me a specific question about a specific piece of land, and if that land doesn't have a covenant on it, it doesn't. In terms of The Blue Cross portfolio there are some covenants on the land in Northiam but very little.

DC - It is worth reiterating that there are strict rules on covenants.

KH - Absolutely there are Charity Commission guidelines which we would not breach.

Volunteer

Q) In my research regarding the issue I've come across a lot of people. One person used to work at the Northiam site and they remember 10 years ago the head office was trying to sell the land and they couldn't because of a restricted covenant. I find it confusing - is there a deadline when that covenant could have run out?

A) SG - I have been with The Blue Cross for 19 years and to the best of my knowledge, hand on heart, I am not aware that The Blue Cross has ever attempted to sell any part of the existing site.

KH - If a piece of land has a restricted covenant on it, it may be for a limited number of years. You ask if any have expired in the last 10 years - the answer to that is no.

Local resident

Q) If you were to go down the route of the satellites, how many would that involve and what would be the total cost of doing that?

A) KH - The first is in the region of £5 million - a pure hub and satellite. The hub is integrated with a veterinary and rehoming centre and three satellites. The model becomes more effective as more satellites are introduced.

Q) £5m as opposed to £2.5m. Where is the money coming from?

A) KH - A big chunk will come from reserves and also fundraising.

SG - it's ambitious but with the purpose of serving animal welfare to the best of our ability. We can't directly compare the establishment of a new hub with the existing Northiam site. They are two quite distinct issues and I think you need to bear that in mind.

Daughter of local resident

Q) I am the daughter of a woman who died 10 days ago on the way to a meeting here. Mum loved The Blue Cross, she backs on to it and she had a cat from it. I just want to state for someone who is going through an evaluation process at the moment, you seem to have made a lot of decisions already, including moving the horses to another site.

A) KH - First of all I am so sorry to hear about your mother. In terms of the evaluation process, it's the evaluation of the specific proposals. Other decisions have been taken in

terms of managing business, such as moving to equine retirement 2-3 years ago. Relocating the retired horses is not a decision, it's part of the proposal. We can't make proposals unless we know what the implications are. We have to think what we would do with the horses. It's the same with small animals - what would we do with the dogs and cats? That doesn't mean we've made the decision.

Volunteer

Q) Going back to hub and satellite, there has to be a 20 minute distance between veterinary services and rehoming centres to move animals around?

A) KH - there is a 20 minute rule. If you are providing an out of hours veterinary service you have to be within 20 minutes. This is a Royal College (of Veterinary Surgeons) guideline. If we were going to have a hub where the vets in the hubs were providing an out of hours service to satellites, they would have to be within 20 minutes. But that's not necessarily the way all the satellites would be. If you have a satellite that is more than 20 minutes away we would consider whether we could leave the animals overnight or would we use another out of hours service.

Q) Could we use local vets near Northiam at a cheaper rate and use their facilities for emergencies, to save money?

A) KH - I'm not sure of the relevance of this question, we already have the services of a vet in this area.

Local resident / previous employee

Q) Why has it taken over a year to come to this decision?

A) KH - This is not a decision, it's a proposal. The decision is yet to be made.

Q) You've hardly given the village a chance to do anything at all. It all comes down to money. Does The Blue Cross actually want to stay in Northiam?

A) KH - You can't divorce money from the issue but it's about how we can use the money to have the best impact on animal welfare. What we are looking at now is how we can retain a presence in the area.

Q) The village wants you to stay but we can't do anything unless you want to stay here.

A) This is what we have to evaluate.

Q) What's there to evaluate? Are you going to even give us the chance to raise money? You can't expect villagers to raise £3m overnight but are you prepared to at least let us have a go?

A) KH - That's one of the things that we will consider. Should we stay in Northiam? If we decide we should, that's when we'll come back to you. But this is premature, we need to wait until we get to the end of the evaluation period.

Q) If Northiam needs so much money is it to expand the kennels and cattery and increase the numbers coming through the door?

A) KH - It's actually to bring the kennels and cattery up to standard. In terms of numbers it would be around about the same but the facilities would be fit for purpose.

Q) But the system works at Northiam now.

SG - The plans that are proposed that have been costed out for £2.5m would help an increased number of owners and animals to be serviced by the centre. Could we reasonably guarantee that we would be able to have a full facility 365 days a year? That's part and parcel of the considerations.

Local resident

Q) Has Kitty Comport's covenant been mislaid?

A) KH - This is hearsay. Kitty Comport's land was gifted to us and none of it has a restricted covenant on it. You can't just lose covenants.

Q) We were told there that paperwork couldn't be found at the previous meeting.

A) KH - The Blue Cross wasn't there so you can't have got that from us. We have the paperwork at The Blue Cross and our solicitors have confirmed that there are no covenants on this part of the land.

Local resident

Q) Re: the missing paperwork - the land registry don't hold the covenant, that's what the confusion is. I know a woman who was deputy manager of Northiam 10 years ago, she understood that head office were always quite keen to sell Northiam but it wasn't possible because of covenant.

You might take from the evaluation the fact that you've got a very positive group who'd like to do things with you. Our involvement in The Blue Cross wasn't as great as it could have been in the past. I think you have an opportunity to enhance this good will in your favour. With some imagination and ideas there's an awful lot of good things you could do here, possibly with the help of Paul McCartney and your own funds to have people working with you.

A) KH - You are absolutely spot on and thank you for saying this. This isn't a 'them and us', this is about animal welfare and doing the best we can for animals. I applaud you for making this statement. How can we work together to achieve the best we can for the animals we care for?

Local resident

Q) If you close Northiam does it not worry you that you will lose income from people who support you locally?

A) KH - absolutely that concerns us. We would like to think people support the charity as a whole but we are aware that locally people may withdraw support.

Q) Have you donated to The Blue Cross or do you just draw a salary?

A) KH - I'm not going to lower myself to answer that question.

Local resident

I'm surrounded by Blue Cross land so I stand to lose more than anyone, but that previous comment was very rude and it doesn't count for the rest of us.

Local resident

Q) I'm having difficulty believing the facts. You did say you were disappointed you couldn't come to the meeting, You said it was on 23 January, it was not.

A) KH - It was a slip of the tongue, my apologies. Please make sure you put the correct date in the minutes.

RB - We have been overwhelmed by the support that this community has shown to Northiam and to our staff in particular and I just wanted to add my sincere thanks to you and to our staff. This has been an incredibly hard time for them. This community has rallied round as has the Felixstowe community and shown our staff enormous support. I recognise that those words are not going to be swallowed by all and some people might be cynical about the words we are saying today but I just want to say thanks for your support.

Q) Let's just hope your higher management feel like you do and treat them well.

A) RB - I can tell you as director of HR and someone involved in these proposals that we do care very deeply. We will do everything and I will do everything I can to consider everything that has come out of this consultation process.

Local resident

Q) Whose decision is it going to be in the end?

A) KH - The executive and the trustees. There are 14 members of the board and there is an executive team with me and six directors.

Local resident

Q) You've mentioned alternatives you have to decide between. What I've heard is that you are short of money, you've decided to go to a hub and satellite policy and Northiam doesn't fit into this. What are the alternatives?

A) KH - This is not about being short of money, it's a case of how do we use the money we have in the wisest possible way and how we may be able to stay in this area.

Q) Is keeping Northiam, one of the alternatives that you will be considering?

A) KH - Yes, we will re-evaluate the original proposal along with other options.

Local resident

Q) I've just moved from the northwest. At what point of your evaluation would you consider going to a developer to sell your land? An associate of mine has already been approached by The Blue Cross to see if they would be interested in buying the land. He's turned it down point blank.

A) KH - I will repeat again categorically that we have not approached any developer. If you give me you friend's name and number I would be happy to have a conversation with him. I categorically say this has not happened.

Q) I walked into The Blue Cross, the girls were all in tears. I contacted my associate, I had known for 15 minutes and he had known that morning. This just smacks of you being here to show a presence, 'let's keep the Northiam crowd quiet'.

A) KH - I am sorry you think that, that's not the case. If we didn't care I wouldn't waste your time or our time. In terms of your associate, give me his name and number because I can assure you that has not happened.

Q) How does he know about it? You need to speak to your people who deal with property.

A) KH - I know there is nobody from The Blue Cross who has contacted any developer. With all due respect I do not believe it's true. I can say this until I am blue in the face, unless I am allowed to speak to people, I've had two people who told me we've approached developers. When I asked for their name and number I didn't get it. I guarantee you now no one from our executive team or property team have approached developers.

Volunteer.

Q) Why has it taken you so long to talk to the public in this way?

A) KH - the consultation period started at the end of January and quite rightly our priority was to talk to staff, then we talked to volunteers, then we talked to members of the local community. The reality is the meeting that you set up, you didn't actually speak to us so how could we suddenly attend? We are still managing an organisation. On 23 February we had other commitments.

Q) I gave you notice and I set that date because we had deadline of 5 March and we were pushed to meet that deadline.

A) KH - We're going on a tangent that isn't constructive. I'd rather we have a constructive dialogue than go into 'he said she said'. We are here and we are interested in listening to what people have to say.

SG - The Blue Cross started a dialogue with volunteers and donors within a couple of days of telling staff.

Local resident.

Q) I know we all need bilateral reserves but I wondered if they were large enough to deal with the financial situation now. We found out from Iceland that charities had millions stored in Iceland but were still asking for financial aid.

A) KH - I am very happy to say we had nothing in Iceland. We do have reserves but the hub and satellite model will take up a large chunk of that reserve.

Q) Is the satellite model absolutely necessary?

A) SG - We have to find other ways of moving forward for the next 20, 30, 40 years, developing hubs and satellites is one way forward for us to consider.

Summing up - Kim Hamilton

- We are as passionate about animals as every single person here.
- We are in an evaluation period now and we will be evaluating everything.
- As soon as we can make a decision we will make it.
- I would like to thank you for your time and your support of The Blue Cross. It's been really heart-warming to see the degree to which The Blue Cross is loved.

ENDS