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Council ‘aid and abet’ illegal bird sales at auction

Bournemouth Borough Council has been asked to justify itself in the face of criticisms of maladministration, which resulted in criminal activity taking place at a bird auction held at Kinson Community Centre on Sunday 30 January 2005. The Animal Protection Agency (APA), a national organisation campaigning against the trade in wild animals for pets, argues that the Council may have been involved in incitement to break the law.

Members of Dorset Animal Action first saw the bird auction advertised and notified APA who immediately contacted Bournemouth BC. The Council were advised of the law and initially agreed to inform the venue and organisers that bird sales at the event could result in prosecution. However, APA then learned that Bournemouth BC had decided to permit the event.

Investigators attended the auction and found that the event had clearly been deliberately disguised as a members-only affair in order to circumvent the Pet Animals Act 1951. Disturbingly, bird dealers admitted that they had been advised by the Council to proceed with the auction as long as they presented it as a private event – even though members of the public were allowed to join on the door for just £2 for annual membership!

There were around 200 birds on sale and each sale represented a contravention of the Pet Animals Act 1951. It was clear that no account was taken of the health risks to the public from close contact with the birds. Exotic birds carry many diseases that are easily transmissible to people in enclosed environments. Nevertheless, food was sold and consumed in very close proximity to the birds.

Sales of pet animals in public places, including auctions and markets, were outlawed in 1983. They still occasionally occur due to poor local authority enforcement – as was the case with Bournemouth BC .

Says Elaine Toland, Director of APA; “It is clear that the bird dealers were wholly misadvised by Bournemouth BC, which has ultimately resulted in them committing criminal acts. The Council took the lead in facilitating the event despite clear guidance from APA and the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health that these events should not be allowed and that offenders should be prosecuted. The Council now faces the embarrassing prospect of having to prosecute itself!”

APA has sought the Council’s assurance that further illegal pet auctions or markets will not be permitted.

* For more information, please contact Elaine Toland on 01273 674253

* We have an ISDN line for broadcast quality interviews.

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