

RSPCA's £75m 'scandal'

Inquiry urged into cash mountain as animal cruelty reaches record

by **Adrian Marks**
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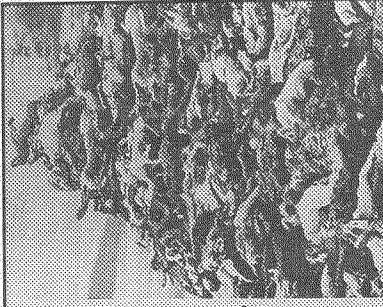
THE ROYAL Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) is facing demands for an inquiry into the salaries of senior officials and the accumulation of reserve funds totalling £75m.

Members of the charity's governing council have accused headquarters staff of running a burgeoning bureaucracy and allowing the reserve to spiral out of control while volunteers struggle to raise money for animal welfare.

They will demand an explanation from RSPCA financial managers this week when the charity announces that cruelty complaints have soared to a record 91,176 in the past 12 months.

Anger at the millions held in RSPCA accounts has been compounded by documents leaked to The Sunday Times which reveal that the salaries of its five-strong executive and four secretaries came to £259,533 in 1993. The RSPCA spent proportionately more on administration last year than any of the other top 10 fund-raising charities. Bureaucracy swallowed £2.9m, 8.6% of its budget, nearly twice as much as the National Trust.

When the Government killed the dog licence they left us to kill the dogs.



Modern marketing: emotive advertisements keep funds flowing

caused largely by an unforeseen increase in legacies.

It has gone far beyond a target of £4.5m, a sum that would enable the RSPCA to maintain operations for 18 months, including the work of 300 inspectors, 48 animal homes, 32 clinics and 24 animal welfare centres. Plans have been drawn up to use the extra £30m to expand its network of animal homes over the next four years.

Despite its reserves, the charity is urging supporters to continue making donations in response to emotive advertisements highlighting the plight of abandoned and abused animals. Officials claim it would have to close within two years if its income dwindled to nothing.

However, Dr Robin Pellew, director of the World Wide

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Fund for Nature, which has reserves of only £2.5m, said the RSPCA did not appear to have made "appropriate" use of its money. "If I was trying to identify which charity I would put my money in, I would be looking for one that was effective but wasn't sitting on a cash mountain," he said.

RSPCA sources dismissed claims of discord between headquarters in Horsham, West Sussex, and volunteers at branch level. They described as nonsense the forecast of a £2m legal bill, and denied that anyone had been treated unfairly.

Wendy Clarke, one of the victors in the Wakefield court case, maintains the charity has lost its way. "What these people did to me after 10 years of caring for animals was disgusting. They have taken the life out of me," she said.

disciplined under rules which the RSPCA now admits were invalid. The handling of "the Wakefield three" was condemned by Lord Houghton of Sowerby, a former RSPCA vice-president, who said it showed the charity was "not a democratic organisation".

Solicitors predict that the case will trigger a barrage of legal challenges from up to 18 other branches where members claim to have been victimised or expelled. David Russell, acting for several disillusioned supporters, said the RSPCA could face costs of £2m.

The charity has already spent £4m on a reorganisation that created 10 regional centres. Branch officials say it has proved so expensive to maintain that one of the new centres may have to close. They claimed that the RSPCA had become top heavy with well-paid administrators.

The £242,461 pay of public relations staff outstripped the £219,075 earned by those working from headquarters on animal welfare, including veterinary experts, staff at Heathrow airport and the co-ordinators of clinics and homes.

Angela Walder, a candidate