

RCVS finally admits it ordered an investigation into its own council members

By Josh Loeb

THE RCVS has officially confirmed that members of its council were subject to an investigation about alleged leaks of confidential information. The investigation is now closed, the RCVS said, and the source of the alleged leaks was not found.

Previously, when asked about the probe, the college declined to confirm or deny its existence. Its official confirmation on 3 September follows *Vet Record's* report that retired police officers working for a private security firm called Probitas were involved in carrying out inquiries into the matter (*VR*, 8/15 August 2020, vol 187, p 88).

The company, run by Mac McCulley, a former head of crime at Northamptonshire Police, was involved alongside lawyers.

The college said it became aware that confidential information had been leaked earlier this year following a story in *Vet Record*. An RCVS spokesperson said that at the time, the college's then president Niall Connell had 'provided a number of informal opportunities' for anyone involved in the alleged leaks to come forward and explain their actions, but no one had.

'Therefore, a formal complaint subsequently made by a council member triggered the complaints policy set out in the college's Code of Conduct for Council Members and instigated the investigation,' the spokesperson added.

'The investigation itself was run independently of the RCVS by an external specialist consultancy, and coordinated by a legal assessor. Initially, the investigators were asked to focus on a single leak, but following a number of further leaks over ensuing months, it became necessary to significantly widen the scope and depth of the investigation.

'The investigators' report concluded that there had been several

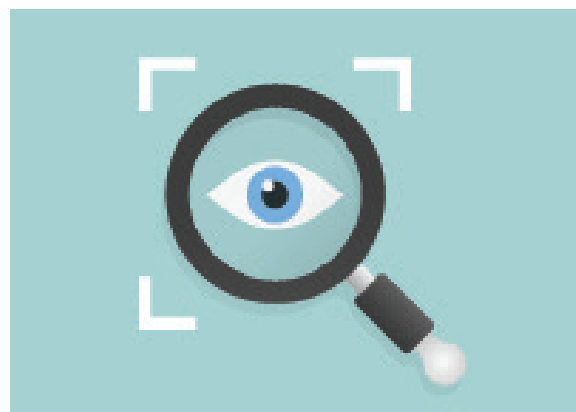
separate and deliberate leaks of confidential information by a current or former council member over an extended period. However, as it had not been possible to identify who specifically was responsible for any or all of these leaks, and no-one had themselves taken responsibility for their actions, no further action under the complaints policy of the Code of Conduct for Council Members was appropriate.'

The RCVS has confirmed the investigation related to a single article in *Vet Record* (about changes to the disciplinary process) and several subsequent leaks to other third parties (ie, not *Vet Record*), but it refused to provide any further details. The college also refused to reveal the cost of the investigation, but it is expected to run into tens of thousands of pounds.

At a council meeting on 3 September a report of the probe, which found that the alleged leaks 'were not the result of poor understanding of college or council processes, but a deliberate decision to provide confidential information to third parties', was noted by council members.

They agreed to review existing training requirements and mechanisms for handling confidential information, and to 'explore in more detail the potential motivation of the person(s) leaking the information, together with the underlying culture of council that might have influenced their behaviour'.

Speaking after the meeting on 3 September, current RCVS president Mandisa Greene, who succeeded Connell in July, said: 'There is no denying this is a sad day for the college, and for RCVS council in particular. As council members of our professions' regulatory body, we must maintain the very highest standards of probity and integrity if we are to maintain the trust and confidence of our professional colleagues. In



the same way, we must subject ourselves to the same level of scrutiny and investigation if these values and behaviours are ever called into question.

'That someone chose to breach the trust placed in them by their peers is extremely disappointing, especially when they were given every opportunity to come forward to discuss their concerns, and avoid the college having to launch a formal investigation.

'Our default position during council meetings is to hold as many discussions as possible in public session to ensure council's decisions are as open and transparent as possible – something that we will continue to increase as much as possible. Like any organisation, however, there may be a small number of issues that need to be discussed in closed session – for example, those still at concept stage prior to any decision being made public or put out for consultation, or those containing personal or commercially sensitive data.

'I sincerely hope that all of us on council can learn from this unfortunate and unnecessary episode. We must rebuild and maintain sufficient confidence in each other, and in our processes, that, even if we disagree on certain matters, it is always best to do so in a direct, upfront and honest manner.' ●



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