



Twycross Zoo – Corporate Governance in a Charitable Organisation

▲ The background

Twycross Zoo is a Charitable Organisation operating in a commercial marketplace and needing to operate successfully as a visitor attraction in order to meet its charitable aims of wildlife conservation and education.

When Abeo Consulting were first involved with Twycross, the Zoo Director had been in post for two years having taken over from the founder directors. The zoo had the feel of a family run business with strong allegiance to the founders and needed to move on to a more commercial basis.

There was much to do, from a governance point of view, in order to meet the requirements of the Charity Commission and to improve the management and leadership of the zoo. The zoo also needed to increase visitor footfall and spend to ensure the revenue that would be the economic driver to build the zoo further. A change programme was needed to achieve that.

The demands on the Board of Trustees were changing and the Trustees were not taking on their full legal responsibilities. There was an urgent need to get the Trustees more appropriately involved in the leadership, direction and development of the business of the Zoo.

▲ Activity

Abeo Consulting was engaged to work with the Zoo Director and the Trustees to develop the governance for the zoo. Initial requirements included:

- Define and agree the roles and responsibilities for the Trustees
- Clarify the boundaries between the Trustees and the Zoo Director
- Identify the skills, knowledge and experience required on the Board
- Agree an approach to recruiting further Trustees to fill identified gaps
- Design a performance review approach for the Trustees

In order to build some leverage a number of charitable zoos were brought together to share the benefit of the exercise and to promote more cross zoo working.

Abeo designed, organised and ran a one-day workshop for a number of zoos, including Twycross, to work through and model the roles and responsibilities of Trustees and the executives in Charitable Zoos. Input was provided by ACEVO, (the Association of Chief Executives of Voluntary Organisations) and the Charity Commission.

The Workshop featured presentations from ACEVO, the Charity Commission and two of the zoos who had already begun to implement new governance. Working groups then designed an optimum governance structure with roles and responsibilities, including the use of Trustees to develop people in the wider business community. Summarised results were issued to attendees.

Abeo Consulting were subsequently asked back by Twycross to assist in the next phase of turning the ideas into action. This included a self-assessment questionnaire on trustee responsibilities and the boundaries between the Trustees and the Chief Executive and how well they believed they were being performed.

Following this exercise, a one-day workshop was held with Trustees and key management to work through resolution of differences of view arising from the results-- for example who should be responsible for managing risk. From this workshop, agreement was secured to an action plan.

▲ **Benefits to client**

Governance of the zoo has taken a major leap forward and the Board are well positioned to deliver the future growth plans, particularly as the management group is working together better.

The Trustees are aware of all responsibilities, including their legal duties and are now focussed on the right areas. There is a much clearer understanding about who is doing what and how well they are performing in the role and what needs to be done in the future. The zoo is much better prepared and organised to meet Charity Commission requirements.

Other benefits include better deployment of the Zoo Director. They have also addressed legal issues around trustee responsibilities resulting in better risk management and better financial controls.

▲ **Benefits of choosing to work with Abeo**

- Approachable and involving style and approach.
- Ability to deal with a wide range of people and roles, to take opinions and advice and to develop a plan that is acceptable to all parties.
- Experience and understanding of corporate governance which enables Twycross Zoo to take a quantum leap forward with its overall governance.
- Helping clients become self sufficient by embedding the work into the way they do business. This is achieved by engagement of the client's teams, training in and transfer of skills.