

STRAY DOGS – OUT OF HOURS ARRANGEMENTS

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: Deputy Leader Councillor George Clements
Portfolio Holder Councillor Geoff Blackwell
LEAD OFFICER: Keith Parker, Head of Leisure and Environmental
Services
REPORT AUTHOR: Toni Magean, Open Spaces Manager

Summary and Recommendation:

This is a report back to Executive, further to a review of possible arrangements for the acceptance of stray dogs 'out of hours'.

It is recommended that Executive

- a) Agree to the proposed fees outlined in paragraph 3.4 to reclaim kennelled strays and
- b) Note management progress with securing out of hours arrangements for the acceptance of stray dogs.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 As reported last November to Executive DEFRA have confirmed local authorities are to become responsible for dealing with stray dogs from April 2007. The police retain only the responsibility for dangerous dogs. Council's have traditionally held responsibility for these duties during 'normal' hours duties which are now to be extended.

1.2 During office hours, the Council's Enforcement Team provides the service for the investigation and collection of reported stray dogs. Dogs then being taken to private sector kennels until recovered by owners, re-homed or, if not claimed, destroyed

1.3 From 1 April and outside of office hours the Council is expected, where practicable, to provide a place to which a stray dog can be taken. This place does not have to be a local authority managed kennel. Given there are only an average 80 such cases per year, economies of scale mitigate against maintenance of separate kennels. Equally there is no obligation to provide a search and collection service outside of office hours as this is not a service

offered by the police. Therefore there is no expectation such a service should be introduced.

3. OPTIONS TO BE CONSIDERED

3.1 At its meeting in November Executive agreed that officers

- a) Explore options/costs with the Councils current Kennel Provider for the provision of an out of hour's service.
- b) Explore with Allerdale Borough Council the option/costs for a shared solution to the out of hour's stray dogs requirements, and,
- c) Review the recovery charges for owners of stray dog reclaiming their pet.

3.2 In relation to 3.1 a) above it can now be reported that the Council's current provider is not willing at this time to act as the place to which strays may be taken, albeit they are prepared to offer, a more costly, collection service. As a result of this negotiations are being undertaken with other providers. These negotiations are aimed at securing alternative drop in centres. Agreement is broadly in place for a drop in centre in Whitehaven covering North of the Borough and one in Millom covering the south of the Borough. Further drop in centres will be made available as agreements are reached and put in place with providers.

3.3 In relation to 3.1 b) above I can advise Allerdale's approach has been to employ a consultant to review their services. Arising from this they have recently advertised for expressions of interest to tender for kennelling and dog drop in centres within Allerdale. An option to 'piggyback' off this tender is open and Copeland's figures have been provided to assist the process. The results of the tendering exercise will not be known until 14 March.

3.4 In relation to 3.1 c) Executive are recommended to introduce an owners recovery fee. In doing so this would encourage owners to take more responsibility for their animals, not only reducing the number of 'stray' dogs but also addressing one of the causes of uncontrolled dog fouling. The Environmental Protection (Stray Dogs) Regulations 1992 prescribes £25 as the amount to be paid by a person claiming to be the owner of a seized dog, additional to all expenses. It is therefore recommended that owners reclaiming dogs are re-charged on this basis in accordance with the Guidance on Stray Dogs.

4. CONCLUSIONS

4.1 From April 2008 Copeland Borough Council will be solely responsible for discharging stray dog functions. Arrangements are being made to ensure the Council's obligations are met, in a cost effective manner.

4.2 In order to encourage more responsible dog ownership charges are suggested to act as a deterrent to irresponsible dog ownership.

5. FINANCIAL AND HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS (INCLUDING SOURCES OF FINANCE)

5.1 No additional finance is sought as part of this report. It is anticipated fees for owners reclaiming their pets will cover the costs of the drop off centres. Costs for administration, unclaimed dogs and the like have been included in the 2008/09 budget build.

6. IMPACT ON CORPORATE PLAN

4.1 Effective enforcement activities have a key role in supporting the Councils environmental protection and quality of life objectives.

List of Background Documents:

Clean Neighbourhood and Environmental Act 2005
Environmental Protection Act 1990 and the Environmental Protection (Stray Dogs) Regulations 1992
Control of Dog Order 1992
DEFRA Stray Dog Guidance

List of Consultees:

Councillor George Clements
Councillor Geoff Blackwell
Corporate Team

CHECKLIST FOR DEALING WITH KEY ISSUES

Please confirm against the issue if the key issues below have been addressed. This can be by either a short narrative or quoting the paragraph number in the report in which it has been covered.

Impact on Crime and Disorder	Effective enforcement contributes towards crime and disorder reduction
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Impact on Sustainability	None
Impact on Rural Proofing	No specific impacts
Health and Safety Implications	Stray Dogs can be a danger to the public
Impact on Equality and Diversity Issues	None
Children and Young Persons Implications	Stray Dogs can be a danger to Children
Human Rights Act Implications	None
s.151 issues	It is anticipated that there will not be a net increase in expenditure to the base budget in respect of this service if the fees and charges are approved.
Legal issues	No further comments additional to the report

Please say if this report will require the making of a Key Decision NO