

ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO CABINET MEMBER

1.	Meeting:	SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY PANEL
2.	Date:	15th July, 2010
3.	Title:	Review of Stray Dog Arrangements
4.	Directorate:	Neighbourhoods and Adult Services

5. Summary

The report provides a review of the Stray Dog arrangements within Housing and Neighbourhood Services with options for the future based on projected costs of service provision, as well as a benchmark of services within the sub region.

6. Recommendations

That the Scrutiny Panel notes the report.

7. Proposals and Details

Since the introduction of the legislative changes to remove Police responsibilities for stray dogs in July 2008 and, thereafter, place full duties with the Council there has been a significant increase in the reports of stray dogs made to the Council. This is demonstrated in Table 1 below.

Although there was an increase in the number of service requests in 2008/9 on the previous year, the number of stray dogs that the Council has processed did not increase as much as expected. Initially it was estimated that there would be an increase of about 400 dogs per year, however the actual increase was less than 200 dogs in 2008/9.

The Council has a responsibility under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 to provide a service which can receive stray dogs handed in by the public. It makes no reference to the hours of operation. However to tackle the public safety and health problems caused by stray dogs as well as the concerns residents have, the Council has provided a patrolling dog warden service as a normal service since before the 1990 Act. As an additional service, the Council provided a 24 hour reception facility after the Police ceased providing these services in 2008.

Actions from July – July	2007/8	2008/9	2009/10 (projected)
Service Requests made to Community Protection	1472	1772	1532
Dogs Seized and processed by RMBC	344	592	528
Dogs Seized and processed by Police	394		
Of these, taken to RMBC out of hours (OOH) kennels and collected by 10pm		173	182
Of the total number of dogs seized, the number left in out of hours cabin after 10pm and before 8am.		5	9
<u>Total seized in the Rotherham Area</u>	<u>738</u>	<u>592 (20% less)</u>	<u>528 (11% less)</u>

Table 1: Number of dogs handled 2007-8 and 2008-9

In the table above, it can also be seen that the projected year end figures for the number of dogs seized by the Council in 2009/10 fell again by 11% as well as a decrease in complaints by 13.5%. With regards to the out of hours provision, there has been an increase of 5% in the projected numbers of dogs received out of hours up to 10pm and taken to our contracted kennels. This demonstrates that there is still a demand for the out of hours provision, however after 10pm there is only a small number of dogs left in the out of hours cabin.

When comparing the service with other neighbouring Councils, Rotherham provides the most comprehensive stray dog out of hours service in South Yorkshire. Doncaster Council only provides a reception facility at its contracted kennels in Doncaster, which are operated privately. Barnsley Council does not provide any out

of hours service. Sheffield City Council owns and operates its own Stray and re-homing kennels as a business which operates outside office hours due to very large demand (which has no spare capacity).

In 2008/09, there was an increase to the Stray Dog budget of £10,000 per year which was funded by a dedicated increase in the Revenue Support Grant to cover the changes in the legislation which removed the Police from the process of dealing with stray dogs.

This funded 7 additional spaces at the main contracted kennels and an out of hours transit kennel arrangement in Rotherham that is linked via Rotherham Connect and Rothercare Direct to an out of hours service to transfer the stray dogs to Doncaster.

With RMBC's approach to all dogs "seized" being received out of hours there has been an increase in customer demand on the owner of the animal sanctuary where the transit kennel facility is sited. Consequently, there has been a need for re-negotiation regarding the arrangements for on-site customer service, including the time spent by the owner on dealing with dogs out of office hours, and basic dog welfare issues. This has resulted in the introduction of part year service fees for 2009/10 and increased annual leasing cost. The costs are shown in Table 2. The use of the Animal Sanctuary staff for the welfare and cleaning work will free up the Dog Wardens to spend more time patrolling and dealing with stray dogs.

The tables below show the costs for 2009/10 which have been incurred to provide a comprehensive out of hours service, and the projected costs for 2010/11 in section 8 of this report assume a 3% increase in the cost of these services;

	2009/10 costs
Additional contracted kennels (Doncaster) (7 no.)	£5,000
Transit Kennel Land Lease (Rotherham)	£1,040
Transit Kennel Customer & Dog Welfare Services (Rotherham) (8 months)	£2,288
OOH stray dog transfer from Transit to Contracted Kennels	£3,460
Total	£12,288

Table 2: 2009/10 costs

Due to increasing costs which are not sustainable in the budget as well as decreasing demand for the service, four options have been assessed. These are set out below.

Option 1 – Continue with current provision in 2010/11

This option will retain our current out of hours provision and provide a 24 hour service. It will enable us to respond to local needs and deal with dogs quickly and provide a local drop off point for customers. See Table 3 for financial details.

The continuation of this service however has a number of disadvantages and uncertainties for the future. These are:

- The Portacabin design kennels require ongoing maintenance and some additional safety modifications in addition to the costs for renting the site. These are detailed in the next section; however there will be an increased budget pressure of £4033 in 2010/11 if the service continues in its current form with a projected overspend of £6,321. With the current climate it is not possible to fund any of this overspend from existing revenue budgets, and an increase in the budget would be required.
- The use of its current location is not guaranteed as it is on privately owned premises (which was the only suitable site identified in 2007 and no other sites have since been identified).
- The temporary nature of the site provides further uncertainties regarding the acceptability of the site.

Continuing with the current arrangements is not financially sustainable without prioritising an increase for out of hours kennelling of £6,400 in 2010/11 reducing to an additional £4,800 in 2011/12.

Option 2 – Remove all out of hours stray dog services.

This option would restrict customer access to stray dog services to office hours, Monday to Friday. Customers would be able to arrange for a Dog Warden to collect Stray dogs from premises, or be advised not to apprehend dogs themselves if they cannot keep them until a Dog Warden can attend.

The increased provision of kennels at our contracted Kennels would need to continue to ensure we can meet the increased demand since the Council took sole responsibility for Stray Dogs, and various scripts within Rotherham Connect would need to be amended. Accordingly Table 4 shows an estimated saving of £1,350 (from the £10,000 additional allocation in 2008/09) on the anticipated cost of the full service in 2010/11, which would increase to an estimated saving of £4,695 in 2011/12.

The disadvantages of this option are:

- There would be no weekend provision and nowhere for the public to take dogs themselves
- There would be an increase in the number of complaints about stray dogs as there will not be any provision to store and collect them at weekends.
- There is likely to be increased pressures on the Dog Warden staff to respond to all the complaints and reports of Stray Dogs.
- Partner agencies such as the RSPCA and the Police would not be able to ensure any stray dogs are secured outside normal Council office hours.

Option 3 – Adjust the service to providing a reception facility at the Councils contracted Kennels.

This option will enable the Council to make a saving of £6,471 on the projected expenditure for 2010/11 as compared with Option 1, and will enable the service to be delivered within the additional £10,000 budget. This can be seen in Table 5 and these savings will be repeated in 2011/12 to reduce the total cost of the out of hours provision to only £6,568. The service would operate out of office hours from 8am until 10pm, Monday to Sunday, with enquiries being directed through the Councils main telephone numbers, where a reference number would be provided for the customer to contact the Kennels. Alternatively members of the public would be told if they wish they can keep the dog until the Dog Warden is on Duty. The RSPCA and other external partners would still have a drop off point for stray dogs that they happen to deal with. Bearing in mind the low demand for out of hours kennelling after 10pm, and the increasing costs of operating the service to maintain 24 hour provision, this option may be the most appropriate.

The disadvantages of this service are:

- customers would have to take stray dogs directly to our Kennels at Hampole, near Doncaster out of office hours. This is an average round trip of 30 miles. Alternatively they could keep the dog until the next working day when it could be collected by the Warden.
- Some dogs may be released or not held by customers and therefore be allowed to continue to roam the streets.
- After 9.30pm (bearing in mind the travelling time to Hampole), there would be nowhere for a stray dog to be taken by members of the public.

Option 4 – Stray dog collection service out of hours by a private kennelling company.

This has the ability for customers to have dogs collected from their own property up to 10pm (no calls responded to after 9pm), however there would be no service provision overnight until 8am. There are no savings associated with this option, as a very competitive quote by our current kennelling provider would result in a total cost of £15,700 in 2010/11 and £12,567 in 2011/12 onwards. The advantage of this service however is the lack of an ongoing asset liability and a simple commercial relationship with one kennelling provider.

8. Finance

The cost of the out of hours service for 2009/10 is £12,288. This is set against a provided budget of £10,000 the £2,288 part year pressure being absorbed by the revenue budget in 2009/10, however this not something which is sustainable. Below are the tables detailing the finance issues and projections for the 4 options.

Table 3 Option 1 – Continue with the current arrangements

	2010/11	2011/12
Additional contracted kennels (Doncaster) (7 no.)	£5,150	£5,305
Transit Kennel Land Lease (Rotherham)	£1,072	£1,104
Transit Kennel Customer & Dog Welfare Services (Rotherham) (Full 12 months)	£3,535	£3,641
OOH stray dog transfer from Transit to Contracted Kennels	£3,564	£3,671
Annual maintenance costs (repairs/painting) of out of hours cabin (estimated)	£1,000	£1,000
Modifications to the electrical and solar power system for safety reasons	£2,000	
Total	£16,321	£14,721

Table 4 Option 2 – No out of hours service

	2010/11	2011/12
Additional contracted kennels only (Doncaster) (7 no.)	£5,150	£5,305
Est. Administrative changes (RBT charges) within Rotherham Connect in 2010/11 only	£3,000	
Disposal of Cabin	£500	
Total	£8,650	£5,305

Table 5 Option 3 – Stray Dog Drop off at Contracted Kennels

	2010/11	2011/12
Additional contracted kennels only (Doncaster) (7 no.)	£5,150	£5,305
Stray Drop off point at Hampole Kennels out of hours by the public	£1,200	£1,263
Est. Administrative changes within Rotherham Connect in 2010/11 only	£3,000	
Disposal of Cabin	£500	
Total	£9,850	£6,568

Table 6 Option 4 – Stray collection by Contracted Kennels

	2010/11	2011/12
Additional contracted kennels only (Doncaster) (7 no.)	£5,150	£5,305
Pick up service out of Hours by current kennelling provider to customer addresses taking calls up to 9pm through Rotherham Connect (150 dogs per year; £47 call out including mileage)	£7,050	£7,262
Est. Administrative changes within Rotherham Connect in 2010/11 only	£3,000	
Disposal of Cabin	£500	
Total	£15,700	£12,567

9. Risks and Uncertainties

The current holding kennel facility in Rotherham does not have a guaranteed future as we do not own the site and do not have a long term lease. Some operational difficulties exist but are being accommodated e.g. the use of solar energy for lighting and hot water.

There is a risk to the reputation of Rotherham Council, as the provision currently in place is the most comprehensive in South Yorkshire, and this has been praised by the RSPCA.

Continuing with the current arrangements is not financially sustainable without an increase in the budget for out of hours kennelling by £6,400 in 2010/11 reducing to an additional £4,800 in 2011/12.

There are no National Indicators or local Performance Indicators relating to Stray Dogs, however there is a risk that a reduction in the service provision could impact in the public's perception of how well the Council and partners are dealing Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour under the Place Survey (NI 1).

10. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications

The Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act strengthen the tools and powers that are key for safer and cleaner neighbourhoods. In doing so addressing the issues that are often a signal for the well being and perceptions of safety in communities will address the "Safe" priority in both the Community Strategy and Corporate Plan.

The Policy has clear linkages to the seven outcomes of the Outcomes Framework for Social Care, and importantly includes:

- ***Freedom from Discrimination or Harassment***, by supporting those who need social care having equal access to services without hindrance from discrimination or prejudice; people feel safe and are safeguarded from harm

11. Background Papers and Consultation

- Enviro-crime Strategy
- Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005
- Environmental Protection Act 1990
- Guidance on Stray Dogs, DEFRA, October 2007

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