

Consultation Report

Future Kennelling Facilities for Rhondda Cynon Taf

July 2016

Consultation Team



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- This section provides a summary of the main findings from the consultation.
- The consultation was conducted in-house and ran from the 6th June to the 4th July, 2016.

Responses Received

The following number of responses were received;

1,733 pre-completed forms
15 emails
5 letters
1 petition (571 signatures)
1 telephone feedback

- 1733 individuals sent in a pre-completed form that stated support for the retention of the existing dog kennelling at the shelter in Dinas.
- 571 people signed a petition – “Do not close Dinas Dog Pound”.

The following are the main themes to emerge from the consultation;

- Specific impact - concern that dogs could be put at risk, that there would be an increase in stray dogs, potentially dangerous dogs and an increase in dog fouling.
- Distance Issues – an increase in distance to the alternative dog pounds could result in people not travelling (due to cost or the lack of a car) and this could lead to more dogs being abandoned or left unclaimed. Could be an issue for older residents.
- There was some concern that the vehicles used to transport the animals were not suitable, as they have no air conditioning.
- Impact on Staff - job losses.
- Loss of other facilities at the pound, such as pest control and recycling kitchen and changing rooms.
- Financial issues – Suggestions of how income could be generated.
- Problems with micro chipping, not always working or used.
- Importance of keeping a local kennel facility.
- The existing service should be improved (eg. Opening times).

- The existing service is invaluable. Out of hours service is essential.
- Private Kennels are full.
- Agree with owner responsibility, should teach in schools.
- It won't help the recycling facilities, it won't stop the queuing.
- Importance of working in partnership with dog charities as this has been successful.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report presents the findings of a consultation on the future of kennelling facilities in Rhondda Cynon Taf.
- 1.2 As a result of the projected decreasing demand for kennelling capacity in the future, there is a need to re-configure the Animal Control Service to be cost effective in the years ahead. There is potential to outsource the service and manage costs in a more sustainable and efficient manner. The option to close the kennelling facility also needs to be considered with regard to the future space requirements for the Council to continue operating the existing Community Recycling Centre at Dinas.
- 1.3 The preferred option is to outsource the kennelling facility and retain a statutory Animal Control Service. The majority of Local Authorities in Wales use a private kennel to provide kennelling facilities for detained dogs. A scoping exercise has been undertaken to identify alternative provision for kennelling facilities for Rhondda Cynon Taf.
- 1.4 Section 2 outlines the background to the proposal and why changes are proposed.
- 1.5 Section 3 details the methodology used.
- 1.6 Section 4 presents the consultation results.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 As a result of the projected decreasing demand for kennelling capacity in the future, there is a need to re-configure the Animal Control Service to be cost effective in the years ahead. There is potential to outsource the service and manage costs in a more sustainable and efficient manner. The option to close the kennelling facility also needs to be considered with regard to the future space requirements for the Council to continue operating the existing Community Recycling Centre at Dinas.
- 2.2 Dealing with stray dogs is the core activity of the Animal Control Service provided by RCTCBC. The Council has a statutory duty to deal with stray dogs. The legislation requires that the Council makes provision to seize and detain any stray dog, then charge a fee for dogs that are claimed by their owners within a statutory 7 day period. Any dog that is not claimed after 7 days must be disposed of by the Council, either by selling it, giving it away or humane euthanization. The legislation does not stipulate the arrangement the Council must have to detain dogs therefore it is not necessary for the Council to have its own kennelling facility.
- 2.3 The Council currently operates its own Animal Shelter at Dinas Depot in Porth which has capacity for 36 dogs. Of the dogs seized by the Animal Control Service, some are found to be micro-chipped and are returned to the owner free of charge on the first occasion they are found straying. For those that are detained, some will be reclaimed by owners but the majority are given to a third sector charity for re-homing. Due to the success of this partnership, the number of dogs the Council has euthanized has reduced significantly and only 10 dogs were euthanized in 2015-16.
- 2.4 There has been a steady reduction in the number of dogs seized and requiring detention at Dinas Animal Shelter over the last 3 years. The Council predicts that this trend is set to continue in line with the requirement from the 6th April 2016 for compulsory micro-chipping of dogs, whereby on establishing ownership details, Animal Wardens will be able to return more dogs directly to the owner on the first occasion they are found straying.
- 2.5 The Animal Control Service is staffed by 3.6 staff. It is open each afternoon, Monday to Friday and Saturday, Sunday and Bank Holiday mornings. Due to health and safety considerations it is necessary for two staff to be present at the shelter at all times when dogs are being

handled or the facility is open to the public. This has a direct impact on the ability of the service to maintain a visible presence across the County.

- 2.6 Staff numbers have reduced over time to manage the costs of running the service. In spite of this, a review of the cost per dog per day based on the average number of dogs detained in the last three years is at least £11.25 per day. This compares to £8.50 per day quoted in the private sector. The actual cost per day of detaining a dog varies annually as our costs for running the facility (building cost and shelter staff) are fixed while the number of dogs we detain shows a gradually decrease every year. The Council predicts that the daily cost of kennelling a dog in our own facility is likely to increase in coming years.
- 2.7 The statutory fee charged as a fine to owners for each dog reclaimed is specified in legislation and cannot be increased. The additional charge for kennelling a dog per day is currently increased annually in line with all Council discretionary fees and charges.
- 2.8 In addition to the increasing costs of operating the kennels at Dinas, there is also a need to redevelop the Dinas Community Recycling Centre, which is next to the Animal Shelter. There are current plans to redevelop and make improvements to the Community Recycling Centre, which are outlined below. The closure of the Animal Shelter would enable the land to be utilised for the benefit of the required improvements at the Community Recycling Centre.

Extension of Dinas Community Recycling Centre

- 2.9 Dinas Community Recycling Centre (CRC) was opened to the public in 2006 and being located within the centre of the Borough has been, and continues to be well used, attracting large numbers of residents especially on weekends. Unfortunately, on occasions the volume of traffic trying to access the site has led to congestion in both directions on the approach to the CRC on the adjacent A4058, Cymmer Road.
- 2.10 With a view to reducing the reliance on Dinas and also to providing additional high standard and accessible facilities throughout the Borough to meet its statutory recycling targets, the Council has invested over recent years in developing its portfolio of Community Recycling Centres. This has been demonstrated with the opening within the last six months of new sites at Llantrisant and Treherbert.

- 2.11 The possible availability of adjacent land to the existing CRC at Dinas also provides an opportunity as another means of reducing congestion through increasing the size of the facility and improving the current site layout.
- 2.12 It has also been identified that a cause of the congestion is the need to temporarily close the site to the public on health and safety grounds when the bins are full and need to be swapped over.
- 2.13 An extension of the site would allow for a continuation of the current split level design onto this adjacent land so allowing a number of these bins to be relocated onto the lower level. This will in turn:
- Allow a greater volume of vehicles to be accommodated within the site to reduce the numbers queuing on the highway
 - Reduce the frequency of temporary site closures as a result of haulage vehicles being now able to access and swap over these well used bins without the need to close the site
 - Reduce the number of haulage vehicle movements to site by increasing the size of these bins to allow for greater capacity to be stored before removal.

Preferred Option

- 2.14 The preferred option is to outsource the kennelling facility and retain a statutory Animal Control Service. The majority of Local Authorities in Wales use a private kennel to provide kennelling facilities for detained dogs. A scoping exercise has been undertaken to identify alternative provision for kennelling facilities for Rhondda Cynon Taf.
- 2.15 The outcome of the scoping exercise did not identify a private kennels in RCT interested in providing the kennelling facility but options were identified to utilise kennels used by neighbouring Local Authorities. Out of County facilities will present additional travel distances for owners who wish to reclaim their dogs. This should be balanced against the owner's responsibilities to ensure their dogs are kept under control at all times and are not allowed to stray. Specific arrangements could be put in place within the Animal Control Service to mitigate the impact of these increased travel distances on vulnerable groups.
- 2.16 The introduction of a mandatory dog chipping requirement for dog owners on the 6th April 2016 is expected to have a further, direct impact on the number of dogs being detained at the Animal Shelter. As

a result, the future revenue budget required to pay for private kennel facilities is likely to reduce.

- 2.17 The Animal Control Service out of hours detention service receives a very low level of demand. Animal Wardens on call receive a stand-by payment to be on call and a further payment when they are required to attend the Shelter. A facility to take dogs in outside normal hours could be maintained at external kennels.
- 2.18 If the kennelling service was outsourced, the Council would continue to employ Animal Wardens to undertake the Council's statutory duty to deal with stray dogs. This would benefit the service provision of dealing with stray dogs, as the Animal Wardens would have greater capacity to focus on resolving stray dog issues in the community rather than deal with the welfare of dogs in the Shelter. In addition the Animal Wardens would be able to assist with resolving complaints of nuisance from barking dogs and have greater involvement in promoting responsible dog ownership.
- 2.19 The option of outsourcing the kennelling facility has key advantages and disadvantages which are as follows:

Advantages

- Opportunity to redevelop and undertake necessary improvements at the adjacent Dinas Community Recycling Centre
- Potential to realise estimated savings in dog kennelling costs
- Enables the Animal Wardens to have greater capacity to focus on their core duty of dealing with stray dogs in RCT.
- Opportunity for the Animal Wardens to increase engagement in projects to promote responsible dog ownership in RCT.
- An Out of hours service will be maintained and made a requirement of any contract with an external kennelling facility.

Disadvantages

- Increased travelling distance for residents wishing to re-claim their dog which could result in less dogs being reclaimed.
 - Increased travelling distance and time for Animal Wardens to drop off dogs which need kennelling.
 - Loss of local standby service
 - Staff redeployment/job loss.
- 2.20 Implementing this Option is the most cost effective way of delivering sustainable dog kennelling arrangements for the RCT. It also supports the Council's strategy of improving our community recycling facilities and improving recycling rates in the County Borough.

Alternative Option**Retain the existing dog kennelling facility and increase fees/charges**

- 2.21 Under this option the Council would continue to operate the kennels at Dinas and would increase fees/charges to offset the higher costs of maintaining the service.
- 2.22 Only around 25% of dogs detained are currently reclaimed by their owners. Owners reclaiming their dogs have to pay the statutory fine and a cost for each day their dog has been in kennels. On average, dogs which are reclaimed by owners are detained for 3.7 days and the income derived from dogs that are reclaimed by owners is small. The fee charged to owners for re-claiming their dog could be increased to reflect the true cost of operating the service.
- 2.23 Other costs such as for the sale of dogs from the kennels could also be increased although dog sales directly from the shelter are negligible as the Council works with the third sector to re-home dogs on our behalf. There is a risk that any increase in fees will result in a decrease in the number of dogs being reclaimed. Based on the low proportion of dogs that are reclaimed by owners, any additional income would not make a significant contribution to the overall costs of running the dog kennels.
- 2.24 The option of retaining the existing kennelling facility and increasing fees/charges has key advantages and disadvantages. These can be outlined as follows:

Advantages

- Retains a dog kennelling facility within RCT
- Increases income to offset the cost of service
- Retains the option to provide an out of hours standby service.
- Maintains links with our existing animal re-homing charity organisation

Disadvantages

- Removes option to provide the necessary space to carry out the required redevelopment of the Community Recycling Centre
- Reduces the opportunity for the Animal Wardens to have greater capacity to focus on their core duty of dealing with stray dogs in RCT.
- The use of the facility is likely to reduce over time due to the impact of micro-chipping
- Increasing charges/fees may lead to reduction in demand for dogs being reclaimed

This option is not proposed.

3. METHODOLOGY

- 3.1 The purpose of the consultation was to seek views on the future of kennelling facilities in Rhondda Cynon Taf.
- 3.2 The consultation has been conducted in-house. The consultation period ran from the 6th June to the 4th July, 2016.
- 3.3 A consultation booklet was produced to outline the background to the proposal. The booklet was sent to key stakeholders, including current licensed animal boarding establishments and copies were available in the kennels at Dinas, as well as in the Council's libraries and One4All Centres.
- 3.4 People were invited to let us know their views in writing to a freepost address or by email.
- 3.5 The consultation was also placed online and promoted via social media.

Responses Received

- 3.6 The following number of responses were received;
 - 1,733 pre-completed forms
 - 15 emails
 - 5 letters
 - 1 petition (571 signatures)
 - 1 telephone feedback
- 3.7 The following are a list of any stakeholder groups that submitted written submissions to the consultation;

Councillors/AMs/MPs

Rt Hon Ann Clwyd MP

Cllr. Pauline Jarman – Plaid Cymru

Voluntary/Community Groups/Special interest

Hoperescue charity

- 3.8 All of the responses received are available for Officers and Members to view, in addition to this summary report.

4 CONSULTATION RESULTS

- 4.1 1733 individuals sent in a pre-completed form that stated support for the retention of the existing dog kennelling at the shelter in Dinas (see below);

<p><u>ALTERNATIVE OPTION</u> <u>RETAIN THE EXISTING DOG KENNELING</u> <u>AT THE SHELTER AT DINAS</u></p>
<p>I WOULD LIKE TO REGISTER MY SUPPORT FOR THE ABOVE OPTION TO RETAIN EXISTING KENNELING</p>
<p>NAME -----</p>
<p>ADDRESS -----</p>

- 4.2 The following petition was received with 571 signatures.

PETITION FORM
DO NOT CLOSE DINAS DOG POUND

- 4.3 3 people from Port Talbot sent in individually signed identical letters. The main themes in the letter were as follows.

- Adverse impact on the welfare of dogs.
- A problem with dogs being reunited with their owners, as a result of micro chipping not always being correct or up to date and that some dogs are not micro chipped.
- Lack of transport will result in more strays and abandoned dogs.
- Potential for criminality (dog fighting), unlicensed breeding and cruel activities.

- Alternative pounds will be full to bursting and unable to cope at holiday times.
- Dog rescue centres are full to bursting and will not be able to cope with demand, therefore more dogs will be put to sleep.
- Job losses

4.4 Of the 5 letters and 15 emails that were received as part of the consultation, the following main themes emerged;

Specific impact

4.5 There was concern that dogs could be put at risk, that there would be an increase in stray dogs, potentially dangerous dogs and an increase in dog fouling.

“by this time next year we will be overrun with stray dogs and dogs fouling the streets”

“.. more dogs straying and posing a threat to the community”

“the closure of this pound will result in stray dogs to be left roaming the roads”

“people phone the shelter daily to report their dogs missing....”

“.....I foresee that people will be less inclined to help these dogs. This will lead to further issues, more dog fouling, possible road traffic accidents, unsupervised dogs attacking other dogs, worse still people”

Distance Issues

4.6 Some of the respondents felt that the increase in distance to the alternative dog pounds could result in people not travelling, due to cost or the lack of a car, and this could lead to more dogs being abandoned or left unclaimed.

“more dogs will be left unclaimed because people are not willing to travel that far or may not have transport.....”

“how will residents be able to retrieve their dogs if they are going to be held many miles away?”

“people who now surrender locally will in the most part not be willing to go all the way to Cardiff or Blackwood and there will consequently be more dogs dumped in parks and the like”

A respondent also noted concern that the impact may be felt more by older people.

- 4.7 There was some concern that the vehicles used to transport the animals were not suitable, as they have no air conditioning.

“There is no air-conditioning in the vans, therefore it is not suitable to transport dogs for any length of time”

“the wardens are going to spend the majority of their time ferrying dogs miles out of areas, in vehicles which I believe are not suited to taking animals for long journeys..”

Impact on Staff

- 4.8 There was concern for the job losses that could result from the proposal being taken forward. Also, other issues that may impact upon the staff.

“...loyal dedicated and caring staff some of whom they’re jobs would be under threat” (sic)

“the wardens will get more verbal abuse than they do now”

“loss of staff changing room and showers”

Loss of other facilities

- 4.9 There were a number of other facilities that one respondent listed as disadvantages of closing the animal shelter, including;

- Poison Room for pest control section
- Storage for dead animals for the highways dept.
- Changing room and kitchen
- Car parking for 56 men from the refuse and recycling dept.

Financial Issues

- 4.10 Some of the respondents questioned the savings that would be made by taking the proposal forward and suggestions of how more income could be made, including;

- pest control and refuse and recycling share the building and have an office, changing locker facilities, rest room and large car parking facility. They should share the running costs.
- At present dogs brought to the animal shelter and are found to be microchipped are returned to their respective owners with no charge on the first occasion of straying.....owners should pay the standard administration fee plus the relevant days kennelling fees to retrieve their animal.

4.11 There was also concern for the potential impact on charities;

“I fear that there will be a massive financial pressure put on already struggling animal and dog charities within the area if harm comes to these dogs, whether that be intentional or unintentional as a direct result of the pounds closure.”

Telephone Service

4.12 There were concerns raised about the out of hours telephone service and how it was now going to work, who would be responsible for taking the calls and logging the correct information. This part of the service was seen as essential.

Microchipping

4.13 There was some concern about micro chipping of dogs, including that the details are not always correct or kept up to date, they do not always pick up in dogs and not all dogs are micro chipped, even though they are compulsory.

Alternative Proposal

4.14 The alternative proposal was the preferred option of hoperescue, the charity that works in partnership with the Council, based on the following;

- Our current working relationship with the kennel staff ensures that the stray dogs are given the best care within the resources available, including regular vet checks, vaccinations and worm and flea treatment and temperament tests. The dogs are transferred in to our care as soon as possible following the completion of their 7 days. The information provided by the kennel staff is invaluable in helping to find foster home or rescue placements for the dogs. Some of the staff also volunteers their spare time to contact us with information or help by transporting the dogs to kennels/vets. If the contract is outsourced then there is no certainty that any external provider will continue to work with us and the welfare benefits of our established partnership could be lost.
- It is important that a kennelling facility is retained locally. Owners may not be prepared to travel to collect their dogs if the facility is provided out of county, increasing the number of unclaimed dogs. We also receive many calls each week about stray dogs, particularly out of hours. It is often difficult to persuade finders to drop dogs to Dinas, and this will be even more difficult if they need to go to a facility out of county.

Other reported issues

- The existing service should be improved (eg. Opening times)
- The existing service is invaluable
- You should increase costs to keep the service
- Private Kennels are full
- Agree with owner responsibility, should teach in schools.
- It won't help the recycling facilities, won't stop the queuing
- Must continue to work with the dog charities as this has been successful. This was confirmed by one the charities in their response.
