

LATE AGENDA ITEM

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

19th JULY 2016

**PROVISION OF DOG KENELLING ARRANGEMENTS FOR RHONDDA
CYNON TAF**

**REPORT OF GROUP DIRECTOR, COMMUNITY AND CHILDREN'S
SERVICES IN DISCUSSION WITH THE RELEVANT PORTFOLIO HOLDER,
CLLR J. ROSSER.**

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1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to outline the results of the consultation exercise and consider options in relation to the future provision of dog kennelling arrangements for Rhondda Cynon Taf

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Cabinet:

- 2.1 Consider the outcome of the consultation and other matters as outlined in the report and the appendices in respect of the future provision of dog kennelling arrangements and direct the Service Director for Public Health & Protection accordingly.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 There has been a steady reduction in the number of dogs seized and requiring detention at Dinas Animal Shelter over the last 3 years. This trend is set to continue in line with the requirement for compulsory micro-chipping of dogs by their owners, which will enable Animal Wardens to return more dogs directly to owners on the first occasion they are found straying. There is potential to outsource the service and manage costs over the next 1-3 years in a more sustainable and efficient manner, as the current operation of the Council's Animal Shelter is no longer cost effective. In addition, the Community Recycling Centre (CRC) in Porth requires redevelopment and the cost

benefits of extending the existing CRC are significant when compared with relocating that facility.

4. **BACKGROUND**

4.1 Dealing with stray dogs is the core activity of the Animal Control service. The Council has a statutory duty to deal with stray dogs and legislation requires that the Council makes provision to seize and detain any stray dog and charge a fee for dogs that are claimed by their owners within a statutory 7 day period. The legislation does not stipulate that the Council must have its own kennelling facility.

4.2 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, those found to be micro-chipped 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. The number of dogs the Council has euthanized has reduced significantly to only 10 in 2015-16.

4.3 The following table illustrates the outcome achieved for all dogs seized and/or detained by the Council over the last three years.

Stray Dogs Outcome	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Seized- Returned to owner directly (microchipped)	128	144	93
Detained- claimed by owner	158	132	125
Detained- sold by LA	24	1	1
Detained- rehomed via rescue charity	258	288	247
Detained- euthanised	65	7	10
Total Seized	633	572	476

4.4 The Animal Control Service is staffed by 3.6 FTE 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.

4.5 The Animal Control service currently takes stray dogs into the shelter outside normal working hours and at weekends. There is no statutory requirement to have a standby provision but there is a statutory requirement to have arrangements in place to detain dogs. A Memorandum of Understanding with the Police requires that this

arrangement is available outside normal working hours, at weekends and bank holidays. Most local authorities fulfil this requirement through a contractual arrangement with a private kennels.

- 4.6 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 daily cost of kennelling a dog in our own facility is therefore predicted to increase in coming years.
- 4.7 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 increased annually in line with all Council discretionary fees and charges.
- 4.8 The animal shelter at Dinas is positioned directly adjacent to a Council Community Recycling Centre (CRC). There are current plans to redevelop and make improvements to the Council's CRC to relieve instances of congestion on the adjacent A4058, Cymmer Road, due to the volume of traffic trying to access the CRC site. The possible availability of adjacent land to the existing CRC at Dinas provides an opportunity as a means of reducing congestion through increasing the size of the facility and improving the current site layout.
- 4.9 An extension of the site would allow for a continuation of the current split level design onto the land currently occupied by the Animal Shelter, so allowing a number of 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.

5. **OPTION APPRAISAL**

- 5.1 Two potential options have been identified for the future provision of kennelling facilities for Rhondda Cynon Taf. These are summarised below.

PREFERRED OPTION - OUTSOURCE THE KENNELING FACILITY AND RETAIN A STATUTORY ANIMAL CONTROL SERVICE

- 5.2 The majority of local authorities in Wales use a private kennel to provide kennelling facilities for detained dogs. A scoping exercise has been undertaken with the Procurement Team to identify alternative provision for kennelling facilities for Rhondda Cynon Taf.
- 5.3 The outcome of the market testing did not identify a private kennels in RCT interested in providing the kennelling facility but there were options to utilise kennels used by neighbouring LA's. Out of County facilities will present additional travel distances for owners who wish to reclaim their dogs. This should be balanced against the owners' responsibilities to ensure their dogs are not allowed to stray and the low proportion of dogs (25%) that are reclaimed from the current kennel.
- 5.4 The introduction of a mandatory dog chipping requirement for dog owners on the 6th April 2016 is likely to have a further, direct impact on the number of dogs being detained. As a result, the future revenue budget required to pay for private kennel facilities is likely to reduce. On analysing the funding required to outsource the kennelling facility, this can be achieved within the existing budget.
- 5.5 The Animal Control Service out of hours detention service receives a very low level of demand (56 dogs in total detained in 2014-15) and there is an additional cost to the Council of maintaining this service. Other local authorities require out of hours detention provision to be made by their private kennels as part of a contract. Therefore, there is a potential to cease the in house out of hours' standby provision and achieve a saving for the Council.
- 5.6 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 afford the Animal Wardens greater capacity to focus on resolving stray dog and dog related issues in the community rather than deal with the welfare of dogs in the Shelter.

ALTERNATIVE OPTION - RETAIN THE EXISTING SERVICE AND INCREASE FEES/CHARGES

- 5.7 The statutory detention fee charged per dog is specified in legislation and cannot be increased. The additional charge per day is increased annually in line with all Council discretionary fees and charges. The actual cost per day of detaining a dog varies annually as our costs for running the facility are fixed however the number of dogs we detain varies and over recent years has shown a gradually decrease every year.

- 5.8 Only around 25% of the 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.
- 5.9 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.
- 5.10 Following the requirement to make dog micro-chipping compulsory, a £10 fee was introduced on the 4th July 2016. The fee has been kept as low as possible, with other local veterinary practices charging between £15 and £40 per dog for micro-chipping. Based on demand for micro chipping in 2015-16 the introduction of a £10 fee could provide additional income of £4000. However some dog rescue charities still provide micro chipping free of charge, which could influence demand for this service.

6 CONSULTATION

- 6.1 The preferred and alternative options for the future kennelling facilities for Rhondda Cynon Taf were subject to a 4 week public consultation which took place from the 6th June to the 4th July 2016.
- 6.2 The full consultation report is attached in Appendix 1. The responses received can be summarised as follows:
- 1,733 pre-completed forms stating support for retention of the kennels
 - 15 emails
 - 5 letters
 - 1 petition (571 signatures): “Do not close the Dog Pound”
 - 1 telephone feedback
- 6.3 The majority of respondents were opposed to the preferred option, namely outsourcing of the kennelling facility and supported the alternative option, namely to retain the current kennelling facility and increase fees. The key themes to emerge from the consultation can be summarised as follows:

- 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.
- 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
- The existing service should be improved (eg. Opening times)
- The existing service is invaluable
- Costs should be increased 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

7. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 An Equality Impact Assessment screening form has been prepared for the purpose of this report. It has been found that a full report is not required at this time. The screening form can be accessed by contacting the author of the report or the Cabinet Business officer

8 FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

- 8.1 Preferred Option - Direct costs of contracting out the service are likely to be cost neutral.
- 8.2 Alternative Option - This will be cost neutral for 16-17 as the level of additional income that may be achieved by increasing fees must be offset by the reduced likelihood of owners reclaiming their dogs.

9 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

- 9.1 The Council has a statutory duty to deal with stray dogs (Section 149 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990). The Act requires that the Council makes provision to seize and detain any stray dog and charge a fee for dogs that are claimed by their owners within a statutory 7 day

period. The statutory fee that must be charged by Council's for the seizure of dogs is set by law and is £25 per dog. The Council has discretion to charge an additional fee for the detention of any dog. Any dog that is not claimed after 7 days must be disposed of by the Council, either by selling it, giving it away or destroying it humanely.

9.2 The Environmental Protection Act does not stipulate the arrangement the Council must have to detain dogs.

10. LINKS TO THE COUNCILS CORPORATE PLAN/OTHER CORPORATE PRIORITIES/ SIP.

10.1 In line with the "Living within our means" Priority, the Council needs to explore different ways of delivering services in order to ensure they are cost effective in the future. The demand for kennelling dogs at the Animal Shelter is likely to decrease in coming years and the option to outsource the kennelling requirements while maintaining an Animal Warden service, provides a cost effective solution for the future.

10.2 A "Place" priority of the Corporate Plan is to improve recycling rates in RCT in order to send less waste to landfill. The closure of the Animal Shelter will provide the necessary space to carry out the planned redevelopment of the Community Recycling Centre at Dinas, which in turn will aim to encourage increased rates of recycling.

11. CONCLUSION

11.1 The two options have advantages and disadvantages which need to be considered in respect of future arrangements for a dog kennelling for Rhondda Cynon Taf. There has been feedback from the public and stakeholders to the consultation undertaken and this requires appropriate consideration. As a result of the projected decreasing demand for kennelling capacity in the future, there is an opportunity to re-configure the Animal Warden service to be cost effective in the years ahead. The consultation undertaken identified the preferred option namely to close the Animal Shelter and outsource the kennelling facility and this option was considered in the context of the future space requirements for the the necessary improvements at the existing Civic Recycling Centre at Dinas.

Other Information:-

Relevant Scrutiny Committee

Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny