

Committee: Community

Agenda Item

Date: 24th January

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Title: Stray Dogs

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Item for decision

Summary

- 1 On the 6th April 2008 the Police will no longer have any responsibility with respect to stray dogs and consequently local authorities will be expected to provide a place where stray dogs can be taken and accepted outside office hours.
- 2 This report makes a number of suggestions as to how such a service could be provided and seeks Members' views on the way forward, it also recommends that the Head of Environmental Health be appointed as the officer for the purpose of discharging the Council's stray dog functions.

Recommendations

- 3 that Members indicate to Officers how they would like the extended duty for accepting stray dogs to be developed and that the Head of Environmental Health be appointed as the officer for purpose of discharging this function.

Background Papers

- 3 Letter from DEFRA dated 19th October 2008

Impact

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Communication/Consultation	None
Community Safety	Stray dogs can cause traffic accidents
Equalities	None
Finance	Yes, although funded through Rate Support Grant
Human Rights	None
Legal implications	Legal duty
Sustainability	None

Ward-specific impacts	District wide
Workforce/Workplace	None

Situation

- 5 The removal of the Police function in respect of stray dogs means that local authorities will be solely responsible for discharging the stray dog functions contained in sections 149 to 151 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. It is not expected that Councils provide a round the clock call out service but will as a minimum be expected, where practical, to provide an acceptance point where the finder of a stray dog could take the animal.
- 6 The Council currently has an informal arrangement with a commercial kennelling establishment in Little Hallingbury for the boarding of stray dogs whilst the owner is sought and the animal returned to its owner. A commercial fee is charged to the owner for the kennelling costs and there is a statutory fee of £25 and a local charge of £35 (reduced to £25 if the dog is micro-chipped) which is levied by the Council. If the animal is not claimed within the statutory 7 days the animal is re-homed by a local dog charity at no cost to the Council. However additional costs can be incurred if the dog needs veterinary attention whilst in our care.
- 7 There have been informal talks with the owner of the kennel and whilst they are prepared to act as the official acceptance point for stray dogs found within the District they are not willing to make themselves available at all hours of the day and night.
- 8 Similar talks have been held with an animal rescue charity positioned just outside our District who could provide round the clock provision but would need to increase their kennelling provision and would expect the costs of adding to their capacity to be met by the Council.
- 9 Other Essex Councils are considering how they might provide a suitable acceptance point and there might be a possibility of sharing a facility with a neighbouring Council.
- 10 The Government have added an extra £4 million to the revenue support grant for the whole of England and Wales to cover local authority costs in carrying out this extended duty, however this has not been ring fenced in individual local authority settlements so any additional costs associated with this duty will have to compete with other demands on the Council's budget.
- 11 The number of stray dogs dealt with each year varies but on average about 50 animals are picked up by the Council, around 5 by the local Police and 10

returned directly to the owner by the finder. The scale of the obligation is not especially large and it is not expected that many finders of stray dogs will want to travel late at night to deliver the animal to a designated acceptance point but will choose to retain the dog until the next day.

- 12 Following early discussions with potential partners Officers are of the opinion that it would be practical to provide a limited out of hours service by extending our existing arrangements with only a relatively small additional cost in providing a retainer to the owner of the kennels for accepting stray dogs at weekends and evenings. Alternatively for an initial outlay estimated at £1000 a suitable kennelling facility could be provided at the animal rescue site which would be available around the clock.

Risk Analysis

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Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigating actions
That the Council will fail to discharge its statutory duty	High	Moderate	None