

REPORT TO: Environment and Urban Renewal Policy and Performance Board

DATE: 18 September 2024

REPORTING OFFICER: Director of Public Health

PORTFOLIO: Environmental & Urban Renewal

SUBJECT: Stray Dog Collection and Kennelling Service

WARD(S) Borough Wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 The purpose of the report is to inform members of changes to the stray dog collection and kennelling service and the approach to procuring this service.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That the report be noted

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 For the past 10 years Halton council has procured its stray dog kennelling service through a consortium of local authorities which includes Liverpool, Sefton and Knowsley. Liverpool City Council led on procurement on behalf of the consortium.

3.2 The current contract was due to expire on 31st May 2024. A procurement process had commenced with market testing revealing that only the current provider intended to submit a bid for the contract. However, at the beginning of February 2024, the current provider indicated that they no longer intended to bid for the contract. Then at the beginning of March 2024 Liverpool CC advised that they were withdrawing from the consortium and would be procuring an alternative service for Liverpool CC alone.

3.3 This left Halton needing to procure a new stray dog collection and kennelling service in less than 12 weeks. Therefore it has not been possible to follow the normal tender process and associated scrutiny and approval via PPB and the Executive Board.

3.4 Acorn Kennels based in Shropshire were identified as a potential provider. They provide stray dog kennelling and collection services for a number of local authorities including Cheshire West & Chester and Cheshire East. The kennels are licensed by Shropshire Council and receive a 5 star rating. The most recent inspection by Shropshire Council was in March 2024 when the license was

renewed. The kennels were inspected by Halton Council in June 2024 and were found to be clean, well organised and demonstrated a high standard of animal welfare and legal compliance.

- 3.5 Acorn Kennels were approached and indicated they would be able to provide the service. A fee of 18K per annum was agreed. The fee is consistent with the existing budget available for the stray dog service. Therefore a decision was taken to direct award the contract to Acorn Kennels to ensure a service was in place from the 31st May. The contract will run until May 2027 with options to extend to May 2029.
- 3.6 Due to the time constraints it was not possible to follow the normal scrutiny and approval process. Therefore prior to the contract being signed, consultation took place with the Executive Board portfolio holder for Environment and Urban Renewal to outline the details of the new service and the approach to procurement. It was agreed that whilst it was not possible to seek Executive Board approval, a report would be taken to the next Environment and Urban Renewal PPB to inform members of the new service.
- 3.7 Approximately 60 stray dogs a year are collected in the Halton area. Only 14 of those dogs were reclaimed. This number has reduced significantly since the introduction of compulsory microchipping in 2016. By way of comparison 411 stray dogs were collected in 2014/15. If a dog is microchipped, and the details are kept up to date, most dogs can be reunited with their owners without the involvement of the council's stray dog service.
- 3.8 The new service with Acorn Kennels is for the collection and kennelling of stray dogs. Dogs will be collected between the hours of 9am to 10pm 7 days a week, including bank holidays, but with the exception of Christmas Day, Boxing Day and New Years Day.
- 3.9 If it is not possible to return the dog to the owner from the place it was collected then the dog will be taken to kennels. The provider operates a licensed dog kennels in Whitchurch, Shropshire which has been issued a 5 star rating by the local authority. It is acknowledged that the kennels are some distance from Halton and so some changes have been made to the fees charged in an attempt to reduce the number of dogs that need to be taken to kennels.
- 3.10 If an owner can be identified they will be contacted and provided with details on how to reclaim their dog.

With the previous contract It was not possible for the owner to collect the dog from the kennels. The kennels were not open to the public. Instead dogs were returned by the contractor direct to the owner at their home address. However a fee of up to £125 was

charged to the owner to reclaim a dog. The fee was retained by the previous contractor and was used to subsidise the overall cost of the service provided.

In recognition that the kennels are now some distance from Halton it is no longer proposed to charge a full reclaim fee. Instead owners will be given a choice of collecting the dog from the kennels in Whitchurch, or for a fee of £20 the contractor will transport the dog back to the owner's home.

3.11 The decision to remove the full reclaim fees will facilitate the efficient return of dogs to their owners and is intended to enable the dogs to be returned direct to the owner without the dog being taken into kennels. The previous arrangement delayed the return of dogs to the owner whilst payment of fees was arranged and processed.

3.12 By law an owner must reclaim their dog within 7 days. After that period the council can by law gift the dog to an organisation that they are satisfied will be able to care for the dog. Acorn Kennels also operate a rehoming kennel. Therefore after 7 days any unclaimed dogs will be gifted to Acorn Kennels with the expectation that as many dogs as possible will be found a new home with a new family.

4.0 **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 This is a statutory service. Under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 the council is under a duty to make arrangements for the collection of stray dogs. Where an owner can be found within the statutory 7 day period the dog must be returned to its owner.

4.2 The animal welfare licensing requirements specify that kennels for the boarding of stray dogs must be separate from the facilities for the boarding of other dogs. This makes the boarding of stray dogs a specialist activity and is reflected by the fact there are very few contractors available to supply this service.

4.3 The police are responsible for enforcing the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991, including dealing with banned breeds and dogs that are dangerous and out of control. If a stray dog that is collected is suspected of being a banned breed the contract requires the provider to liaise with the police to ensure the dog is handled appropriately.

4.4 There is no patrol or enforcement function associated with this contract. The purpose of this contract is solely to fulfil the council's statutory obligation to collect and kennel stray dogs.

5.0 **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 Given the very small number of stray dogs now collected annually it

is not economically viable for the council to provide the kennel facilities, trained staff and vehicles required to operate this service in house. A service of this nature needs to be procured at scale through a consortium of local authorities, or through a contractor who has the necessary facilities to provide this service on a viable scale.

5.2 The fee agreed with the contractor is consistent with the budget available for this service. This arrangement therefore offers the best value available to the Council to enable it to fulfil this statutory function.

5.3 The overall fee agreed with the contractor is not dependent on additional reclaim fees being levied and retained by the contractor. Therefore the decision to remove reclaim fees does not have any impact on the financing of this service.

6.0 **IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

6.1 **Improving Health, Promoting Wellbeing and Supporting Greater Independence**

None

6.2 **Building a Strong, Sustainable Local Economy**

None

6.3 **Supporting Children, Young People and Families**

None

6.4 **Tackling Inequality and Helping Those Who Are Most In Need**

None

6.5 **Working Towards a Greener Future**

None

6.6 **Valuing and Appreciating Halton and Our Community**

This statutory service prevents stray dogs being a nuisance or danger to the public.

7.0 **RISK ANALYSIS**

7.1 This arrangement ensures the council can continue to fulfil its statutory obligations. Therefore there are no significant risks associated with this proposal.

8.0 **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

8.1 No equality or diversity implications have been identified.

9.0 **CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 No significant climate change implications have been identified.

10.0 **LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF
THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

None under the meaning of the Act.