

Report of	Meeting	Date
Director of Public Protection Streetscene and Community (Introduced by the Executive Member for Public Protection)	Executive Cabinet	21 January 2016

STRAY DOGS KENNELING ARRANGEMENTS AND CHARGES

PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. To advise Members of the current and proposed arrangements for dealing with stray dogs and seek agreement to a revision in service provision and service charges.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

2. Members agree to the Council's stray dog pick up service being provided through an external contractor should the economic case be made for it in the forthcoming procurement of a kennel provider.
3. Members agree to an increase in the kennel release charge from £32.50 to £80 for owners who wish to recover their dogs from the Council and the per day kennelling costs are met by the dog owner on release and recovery of the dog at the daily kennelling fee agreed between the Council and the kennel provider.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF REPORT

4. Chorley Council has a long standing stray dog pick up service that includes the use of an external kennel contractor to retain dogs for the statutory 7 day period whilst the owner of the stray dog is traced or comes forward to claim their dog.
5. The current kennel contract comes to an end in March 2016 and provides an opportunity to review the way in which we deal with stray dogs.
6. There are a number of kennel providers who are now offering a stray dog collection service and it is proposed that the procurement of a new contract includes this element of the service within the procurement specification.
7. When a dog owner reclaims their dog they are currently required to cover the cost of its pick up and kennelling costs up to a maximum of £102.50. (£10 per day kennel costs plus a flat rate release fee of £32.50).
8. A number of local authorities are known to charge the owner a single flat rate for release irrespective of the time the dog has been kennelled. For example South Ribble and Preston Councils charge in the region of £150 for the release of a dog to its owner.
9. A flat rate charge at this level reflects more accurately the cost in officer time and administration for dealing with a stray dog
10. It is proposed that our charging structure is amended to a flat rate release fee of £80 plus the kennelling costs incurred by the Council in holding the dog up to a maximum of 7 days. The charge will be subject to

Confidential report Please bold as appropriate	Yes	No
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Key Decision? Please bold as appropriate	Yes	No
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Reason Please bold as appropriate	1, a change in service provision that impacts upon the service revenue budget by £100,000 or more	2, a contract worth £100,000 or more
	3, a new or unprogrammed capital scheme of £100,000 or more	4, Significant impact in environmental, social or physical terms in two or more wards

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION(S)

(If the recommendations are accepted)

- To ensure the Council has a stray dog service appropriate to meet demand with a charging scheme that reflects actual costs incurred and is commensurate with neighbouring local authorities.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

- Retain the current means of stray dog service operation without testing the market and retain the current charges for the release of kennelled dogs.

CORPORATE PRIORITIES

- This report relates to the following Strategic Objectives:

Involving residents in improving their local area and equality of access for all		A strong local economy	
Clean, safe and healthy communities	√	An ambitious council that does more to meet the needs of residents and the local area	

BACKGROUND

- The Council's stray dog service operates during normal office hours with a reduced service out of hours up to 2100hrs on week days and from 0900hrs to 2100hrs on weekends and bank holidays (except Christmas Day).
- The service is currently part of the neighbourhood officer duties and about 200 dogs are collected and kennelled as strays each year. Approximately 30% of these are dealt with out of normal Council business hours and therefore incur an additional cost to the Council in terms of standby and overtime payments to officers.
- When a stray dog is collected it is initially scanned for a microchip and if there is a microchip present the owner details are obtained and officers seek to return the dog to the owner at no cost to the owner.
- If there is a persistent case of a dog being allowed to stray then officers will seek to prosecute the owner under the relevant legislation.
- Where the dog cannot be returned immediately it is transferred to a contracted kennel where, under the statutory requirements, the Council is obliged to retain the dog for 7 days or until it is claimed whichever is the earlier.
- The number of stray dog service requests received each year is around 600 and last year over 300 service requests were out of normal business hours. Of these out of hours calls 188 required an officer visit and 56 dogs were picked up and taken to the contracted kennels.

OUT OF HOURS PICK UP ARRANGEMENTS

20. The current kennel contract comes to an end on 31 March 2016 and the Council will be seeking a new contract through our normal procurement procedures to continue and enhance the service.
21. Officers are aware that some kennel providers now offer a pickup service and it would be prudent to include this element of service provision in a contract specification to establish if the service can be provided more economically than at present and particularly out of hours..
22. The current out of hour's provision operates each weekday evening until 2130 hours and at weekends from 0900 to 2130 hours. After 2130 hours there is no collection service as the kennels do not accept dogs after this time. There are no proposals to extend the service times at present.
23. Should a dog remain unclaimed beyond the statutory 7 day kennelling period, officers and the current kennel contractor will seek to rehome the dog, but in the event that this is not possible the animal will be 'put to sleep' (euthanised) at the Councils expense.
24. Members should note that in the past 18 years the vast majority of stray dogs have been either returned to their owner or found a new home.
25. The use of euthanasia has only been used for extremely sick or injured dogs picked up as strays or where they are a controlled/banned breed under previous and existing dangerous dog legislation.
26. On occasion officers come across dog owners who repeatedly allow their dog to stray. Where the release fee and kennel charges do not act as a deterrent to further incidents, we have the ability to escalate enforcement action, ultimately using prosecution in the courts to tackle serial offenders. However in the initial stages we would seek to work with the dog owner to address responsible ownership issues and offer rehoming for the dog where the owner is unable to keep their dog from straying.

PROPOSED RELEASE FEE

27. Currently the Council makes a charge to dog owners seeking to reclaim their dogs that have been picked up as strays. This charge is made up of a flat rate release fee of £32.50 plus the kennel costs incurred during the dogs stay in kennels. Currently these amount to £10 per day up to the statutory maximum stay of seven days (£70).
28. Neighbouring Authorities make a significantly greater charge which is inclusive of the maximum kennelling costs (up to seven days) irrespective of length of stay as well as a release fee. For example:
 - South Ribble – Release Fee plus Kennel Fee £150
 - Preston CC - Release Fee plus Kennel Fee £130
29. It is proposed that our release fee is increased to £80 but to retain the per day cost of the kennelling charge. This would mean that at current kennelling rates (£10 per day) the maximum charge to release a dog kennelled for 7 days would be £150.

MICROCHIPPING NEUTERING AND TRANSFER

30. As part of the Councils commitment to tackling stray dogs we provide a microchipping service free of charge to any Chorley resident requesting it for their dog. Whilst there is no qualitative data on the direct impact this service has on the ability of officers to return found dogs to their owners directly, officers have seen an increase over recent years in the number of dogs found who have a microchip and can be returned directly to the owner.
31. In addition the Council also offers a service to encourage dog owners to neuter their dogs. This has the impact of reducing the number of unwanted litters which could become future stray animals.
32. Finally the Council offers a transfer service where dog owners who no longer want their dog can transfer its ownership and we facilitate this through kennel contacts, dog rescue centres and local contacts.

IMPLICATIONS OF REPORT

33. This report has implications in the following areas and the relevant Directors' comments are included:

Finance	√	Customer Services	
Human Resources		Equality and Diversity	
Legal	√	Integrated Impact Assessment required?	
No significant implications in this area		Policy and Communications	

COMMENTS OF THE STATUTORY FINANCE OFFICER

34. The increase in the release fee will better reflect the cost of administration for dealing with stray dogs and will contribute approximately £2.5k annually to the budget. The charge is comparable to that of neighbouring Councils outlined in the report.

COMMENTS OF THE MONITORING OFFICER

35. No comments.

JAMIE CARSON
DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC PROTECTION SREETSCENE AND COMMUNITY

There are no background papers to this report.

Report Author	Ext	Date	Doc ID
Simon Clark	5732	14 December 2015	Straydogs2015