

PORTFOLIO HOLDER – SAFER AND STRONGER COMMUNITIES

DATE	21 st March 2021
REPORT OF	Councillor Shepherd – Portfolio Holder for Safer and Stronger Communities
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER	Sharon Wroot, Executive Director of Environment, Economy and Resources
SUBJECT	Review of Stray Dog Functions provided by the Regulation and Enforcement Services
STATUS	Open
FORWARD PLAN REF NO.	PHSSC 03/22/02

CONTRIBUTION TO OUR AIMS

The recommendations detailed in this report would allow for the stray dogs functions to be delivered within the budget allocated and contribute to the delivery of:

- Investing in our Future, by ensuring all people in North East Lincolnshire benefit from a high quality environment.
- Vitality & Health, by providing safe and attractive public spaces which local people can enjoy promoting health & well-being.
- Economic recovery and growth, by providing quality of place and an enjoyable resort, we encourage investment and increased visitor numbers, bringing with it prosperity and jobs.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report aims to outline the proposed changes in relation to the stray dog function provided by the Environmental Enforcement Team, which will allow the functions to be provided with the budget available.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Portfolio Holder for Safer and Stronger Communities approve the following service changes around the councils stray dog service to come into effect 2nd May 2022.

1. To remove public drop off point at the Doughty Road Depot at all times;
2. To undertake a service re-design to provide reduced facilities at Doughty Road Depot to allow officers to temporarily keep dogs on site during Monday-Friday 9-3pm only (this would be reviewed after 12 months);
3. To cease weekend call-out cover by officers.

REASONS FOR DECISION

These service changes are recommended due to the following:

1. Changes to Doughty Road site affecting stray dog kennels
2. Staffing Implications to ensure the welfare of the dogs during evening and weekends and to conduct the necessary observations during these times
3. Staffing Implications regarding officer availability to receive stray dogs into Doughty site outside of normal working hours and weekends.

1. BACKGROUND AND ISSUES

1.1.1 North East Lincolnshire Council duties around stray dogs are delivered by the Environmental Enforcement Team with Environmental Services.

1.1.2 Sections 149 and 150 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and Environmental Protection (Stray Dogs) Regulations 1992 place a duty on the authority to seize and detain stray dogs.

1.1.3 LAs are expected to provide a place to which stray dogs can be taken. Authorities are not required to offer a night-time call-out service or 24 hour cover. Authorities must make provision to house the stray dogs they seize or which are brought in by other persons.

1.2 Current Arrangements

1.2.1 The team has a number of experienced officers in the area of stray dogs, currently this is delivered on a 5-day rota basis between officers with a voluntary staffing arrangement operating at the weekend/bank holidays to which officers are duly remunerated in line with council policies.

1.2.2. Stray dogs are currently collected by officers following a resident report, or dropped off by members of the public are presently held in kennels at Doughty Road Depot.

1.2.3 This is normally for up to 24 hours to allow initial identity checks to aid reuniting with their owner, but during weekends this time can increase up to 72 hours. Owners identified during this time will be contacted as quickly as possible by the team and asked to collect their animal. If not reunited, with the owner the dogs would be taken to the contracted kennels by an officer. At weekends anyone arriving at Doughty Road Depot with a stray dog would be asked to put them into the outside kennels and the control room would notify the duty officer.

1.2.4 Owners collecting their dog from either Doughty Road Depot or the contracted Kennels, Sangreat Kennels, Brigg will be charged a fee which must be paid prior to the dog being released.

1.3 Current Challenges

To meet new higher DEFRA standards, Animal Welfare rules state that all detained dogs must be observed regularly throughout the day, no more than 4 hours apart. Out of hours, it is recommended all dogs should be inspected at least once between

the hours of 1800-0800.

This would require an officer to visit the site between these hours. To meet these higher standards, additional staffing would be required and a review of team structure and work patterns therefore increasing costs. It is likely a new rota would have to operate over two shifts.

1.4 Benchmarking

In reviewing the stray dog function, a benchmarking exercise was undertaken with nearby authorities in the Lincolnshire/Humber/South Yorkshire Region area. Compared to other authorities, of the six that answered, only one local authority provided public drop-off facilities at council depots/offices. The other five relied on contracted kennels providers receiving dogs. In addition, the maximum distance to NELC's contracted kennels from within North East Lincolnshire was below the average distance from those questioned.

2. RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES

The proposed changes to the service will bring about the following benefits and outcomes:

2.1 Health & safety compliance / Comply with Animal Welfare guidance

From an Animal Welfare perspective transferring stray dogs collected by officers to an established kennels with proper segregation and exercise facilities at the earliest convenience is advisable.

2.2 Reflect regional practises

The benchmarking exercise indicates the majority of other LA's do not provide drop off points within council facilities. Also, the distance to travel for any resident of North East Lincolnshire to travel to the contracted kennels is less than the average distance.

2.3. Impact on key priorities

Implementing these recommendations would allow the team to maintain a 5-day rota for stray dogs collections, offer owners the ability to reunite with their dogs from the town centre location by appointment and for the team to continue to manage the full range of key priorities such as tackling fly-tipping, abandoned vehicles and other waste related offences.

3. OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

3.1 Retain 7 day a week service with public drop-off and overnight provisions

This was not considered viable due to the costs involved on the facilities and provide additional staffing 7 days a week to fall in line with the observation requirements through the evening.

3.2 Providing call out service to collect stray dogs and utilising reduced

facilities over 7 days a week with no public access

This was not considered viable due to the current voluntary nature of the staff call-out arrangements and that there are arrangements in place with the contracted supplier to receive stray dogs within their operating hours e.g. 9-5 Mon-Sat. 1300-1600 on Sundays/Bank Holidays

3.3 Service re-design to ensure no dogs are received or kept at Doughty Road Depot at all.

This option would see officers collecting stray dogs from residents and delivering them directly to contracted kennel provider within their operating hours. However, it was not considered viable as it was still felt important to maintain a 5 day a week collection service from Doughty Road for stray dogs by appointment only.

This will ensure that responsible dog owners who have micro chipped their dogs can be re-united with their animals quickly without any need to travel further.

4. REPUTATION AND COMMUNICATIONS CONSIDERATIONS

Pets are very important to families and stray dogs are no exception to this rule. Therefore, our handling of stray dogs can attract negative publicity from time to time.

To mitigate these risks, the team will work through an action plan that will involve updating contact centre staff, make changes to the NELC website, update other NELC teams and partners along with a transition plan.

This will also be supported by the Communications Team and the council will respond showing the positive effects of responsible dog ownership and legal requirements of micro chipping in order to inspire behaviour change.

5. FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

The changes proposed will result in a small saving in overall expenditure to the service in relation to the voluntary weekend cover payments to officers.

6. CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct impacts on children and young people as a result of this report

7. CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no impacts on climate change and the environment as a direct result of this report.

8. CONSULTATION WITH SCRUTINY

Not Applicable

9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The changes proposed will result in a small saving in overall expenditure to the service.

10. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

The report outlines changes to the service; however, the authority's statutory responsibilities in law would continue to be met.

11. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct HR implications arising from the contents of this report.

12. WARD IMPLICATIONS

Affects all wards

13. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

14. CONTACT OFFICER(S)

Neil Clark, Strategic Lead for Regulation and Enforcement Tel: 01472 324805

Councillor Ron Shepherd
Portfolio Holder – Safer & Stronger Communities