

Title of meeting: Cabinet Member For Environment and Community Safety

Date of meeting: 25 January 2017

Subject: Portsmouth Stray Dog Kennels Boarding Dogs for the Homeless

Report by: Director of Regulatory Services and Community Safety

Wards affected: All

Key decision: No

Full Council decision: No

1. Purpose of report

- 1.2** This report is in response to Councillor Robert New's request for a policy whereby Portsmouth City Council will provide temporary boarding for a dog that is owned by a rough sleeper person. Boarding will be offered should they be given temporary accommodation to a premise not allowing animals.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1** That this policy (Appendix 1) be piloted to identify demand and costs of boarding these dogs at no charge to the rough sleeper. The pilot will be in place until the 31 March 2018 before a final decision is made to adopt the policy permanently thereafter.

3. Background

- 3.1** Portsmouth City Council stray dog kennel currently boards dogs at the request of other departments. This includes Adult Social Care which temporarily boards dogs on behalf of their clients. A referral form is completed and the referring agency will pay the fee dependant on the length of stay at the kennel. These referrals are referred to as 'emergency boarders' as the owners are unable to look after their dogs for a period of time often due to a hospital stay. The boarders are reunited with their owners when their circumstances enable them to take back their dog.
- 3.2** Portsmouth stray dog kennel is not currently a public boarding kennel other than by those classed as 'emergency boarders', and exists to meet the local authority's statutory responsibility. This duty is provided in the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and requires the local authority to be responsible for stray dogs and their welfare under Section 149 and Section 150.

3.3 It is proposed that under a new policy (appendix 1) that dogs owned by homeless individuals being temporarily housed, will be accommodated at the stray dog kennel at no charge. The policy requires:

- A referral being made by housing options confirming a placement is being requested including details of the owner and dog
- The dog being microchipped to the owner and having relevant up to date inoculations
- Visits to the boarded dog are by prior arrangement and during normal office opening hours to ensure staff are able to assist with the visit
- The owner retains responsibility for exercising the dog during its time boarded at the kennel.
- That dogs being taken away from the site are returned prior to kennel closing to enable the dog to be bedded down for the night.
- That the dog is signed back to the owner as soon as it is agreed that the criteria for securing a kennel place are no longer met.

3.4 There may be occasions when there is no room for these dogs in which case, staff will assist to identify other suitable facilities in the area. This includes boarders impacting on the kennel's statutory duty of housing strays. Stray dogs will take priority over all other dogs that may be placed in the kennels to enable the council to fulfil its statutory duty.

3.5 Current charges for dogs boarded at the kennels but being waived in this policy could include:

- Day 1 admin fee £11 and kennel fee £26
- Day 2 and each day thereafter daily fee £26
- Vaccinations as required £42
- Microchip as required £10
- Flea/worming treatments £8 - £16 dependant on size of dog

4 Risks

4.1 The risks to the stray dog kennel are listed below:

- Loss of income from letting out kennel used to house dogs under this policy.
- Housing Options has confirmed that boarding times could be anything between 3 months and 2 years before accommodation is available, suitable to accommodate a dog.
- Additional costs of staff and other costs e.g. food and cleaning materials to care for an unfunded boarder is not budgeted for.
- The budget could be overspent if a vaccination, micro-chipping, boarding elsewhere and other veterinary treatment is charged to the current Stray dog kennel budget.
- Health and safety of kennel staff (risk of assault) due to potential complex needs of this client group.
- Dispute over ownership of dog and proving that relevant inoculations are up to date.

- Concern for the welfare of the dog should boarding be required for an extended period of time.
- The kennels reach over capacity and these dogs restrict ability to carry out the statutory function and reduce the ability to receive additional income.
- Future consideration to provide a public boarding kennel or provide services for other authorities could be impacted by the introduction of this policy.

5. Reasons for recommendations

- 5.1** It has been identified that homeless people can refuse the offer of accommodation if they are unable to take their dogs with them. It is also acknowledged that the cost of boarding a dog is often out the reach of a homeless person trying to settle into a more secure lifestyle. Therefore it is believed that by offering a temporary (non-charged) boarding solution that this may enable more individuals to access housing. There are costs associated that Portsmouth City Council will incur as a result of this policy hence the proposal to initially run this scheme as a pilot and review before committing permanently.

6. Equality impact assessment

- 6.1** A preliminary Equality impact assessment was completed and it is not recommended to proceed to a full assessment due to the policy change not impacting negatively on any of the protected characteristics as described in the Equality Act 2010. Portsmouth does not currently have equality data regarding the makeup of homelessness in Portsmouth but a Homeless Working Group has been interviewing and carrying out a survey on some of those considered homeless. A report and recommendations will follow from this group so further information may become available then. I do not envisage that this policy would disproportionately impact on any particular group as this would be offered to the person who finds themselves in this difficult position regardless if they belong to a protected characteristic or not.

7. Legal implications

- 7.1** The above policy has no standing within the relevant sections of the EPA 1990, that said the position outlined within the proposed policy does not breach the Act and subject to balancing the risk of impact upon the undertaking of the primary duty under the Act is not such as to be a policy in respect of which there are any other relevant legal implications.

8. Director of Finance's comments

- 8.1** There are 14 kennels of which 4 are understood to be committed contractually to other local authorities and, on average, 5 are utilised to meet the current kennel requirements. Therefore the remaining 5 kennels are currently available to meet peaks in demand and for expansion in service provision to generate additional income.

- 8.2** The current kennelling budget incorporates income of some £50,000 per annum, however current indications are that this is not being achieved, through either lack of take up or capacity availability at specific times, giving a current budget pressure of around £20,000.
- 8.3** Implementation of the proposed policy will utilise and reduce the capacity to generate additional income and is likely to increase costs where capacity in our own facility is unavailable. Based on a 9-12 month boarding placement this could add around £7,200 - £9600 per dog boarded if the dog had to be placed with another provider; based on our current fee levels. Any financial impact arising from the proposals within this report will need to be accommodated within this existing directorate cash limit resources.

.....
Signed by:
Director of Regulatory Services and Community Safety

Appendices: Appendix 1 Homelessness Boarding Policy

Background list of documents: Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972

The following documents disclose facts or matters, which have been relied upon to a material extent by the author in preparing this report:

Title of document	Location

The recommendation(s) set out above were approved/ approved as amended/ deferred/ rejected by on

.....
Signed by:
Cabinet Member for Environment and Community Safety