

ANIMAL WELFARE POLICY

Executive Summary

Animal welfare has been identified as an important topic for the authority and this report has been prepared to commence the development of an animal welfare policy for Woking Borough Council and partners.

The Council administers the functions of the Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (England) Regulations 2018. These regulations were introduced as secondary legislation under the Animal Welfare Act 2006 and update the registration and licensing systems for activities involving animals to bring them in line with modern animal welfare practices and standards.

The Council is fully committed to promoting and protecting the welfare of animals in line with this and other legislation and related guidance and Codes of Practice. In addition there is aspiration for the Council to formally further commit to the promotion of animal welfare and protection from harm, with a commitment to the public that we are doing all we can to promote excellent standards of welfare in our Borough.

A draft comprehensive guide has been produced for residents, which will signpost to the organisations responsible for each aspect of animal welfare and licensing. This is attached as Appendix 1.

It is proposed to make more of our sites available for licensed grazing where appropriate.

It is proposed to consult with partners and residents upon the document attached at Appendix 1 before receiving a further report in order to adopt a formal Council policy for Animal Welfare. Consultation and engagement with key stakeholders will inform the policy.

Recommendations

The Executive is requested to:

RESOLVE That

public consultation be undertaken as proposed in the report and engagement be carried out to inform a draft Animal Welfare Policy.

Reasons for Decision

Reason: To promote animal welfare, publish a draft guide and development of Council policy.

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| The Executive has the authority to determine the recommendation(s) set out above. |
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Background Papers: None.

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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The welfare of animals is an important matter for the Council which alongside its regulatory role has additional responsibilities in relation to the use of its land and property and to the activities it undertakes in carrying out its wider range of duties.
- 1.2 There are a wide range of existing activities and involvement relating to animal welfare within the Council spread across a number of different service departments.
- 1.3 **Environmental Health** – the team deal with animal licensing, including dangerous wild animals, horse riding establishments, animal (cat and dog) boarding establishments, dog breeders, exhibited animals and pet shops. This includes regular inspections and licensing with fees payable. Staff carrying out inspections are required to have certain qualifications and as a result the Council offer this service to its colleagues in Surrey Heath Borough Council for a fee, and the Council is pursuing a similar arrangement with Rushmoor Borough Council.
- 1.4 The team also manage an external contract to collect stray dogs 24 / 7 and 365 days a year. The Council are legally required to provide this service.
- 1.5 The team also deal with dog barking and dog fouling complaints (delegated powers to enforce under statutory nuisance and with fixed penalty notices respectively) and dog on dog attacks.
- 1.6 The team also provide advice and take details of lost dogs.
- 1.7 **Asset Management** – colleagues deal with Horse Grazing on Council owned land. The Council has a number of sites where horses are permitted to graze with a licence and fees payable annually. As section 2 below it is proposed to increase the sites available in the future.
- 1.8 **Neighbourhood Team** – Neighbourhood officers deal with stray horses, fly grazing (typically horses left on land without owner's permission) and tethered horses where there are specific welfare or public safety concerns.
- 1.9 **Green Infrastructure Team** – dealing with animal conservation and protection, for example, officers work with Surrey Heathland Partnership to provide Council owned heathland for pony grazing / conservation grazing.
- 1.10 Officers also signpost to other organisations for injured bats, swifts, peregrines, badgers and hedgehogs as enquiries are received.
- 1.11 **External Agencies** – a number of external organisations also deal with animal welfare, for example; the Police deal with dangerous dogs / banned breeds. RSPCA deal with animal cruelty / severe cases of neglect and welfare issues. With Surrey County Council Trading Standards and Defra dealing with the movement of animals, livestock and farm animals.
- 1.12 The attached document (Appendix 1) seeks to set out current responsibilities creating a guide for residents and stakeholders.
- 1.13 Notwithstanding the legislation and related guidance and Codes of Practice, and the information in Appendix 1, it is proposed that consultation and engagement with key stakeholders takes place, not only on the content of the Appendix but on how the Council can more robustly commit to the promotion of animal welfare and protection from harm, with a commitment to the public that we are doing all we can to promote excellent standards of welfare in our Borough.
- 1.14 Various legislative Acts and Codes of Practice are already in place but there is a need to consider what further actions can be taken at a local level to set out our approach to:
 - the welfare of animals across the Borough;

- the welfare of animals on Council property and our duty to act against cruelty in relation to council activities, land holdings such as farms;
- animals in the work place; and
- animal ethics in Council Business.

1.15 It is envisaged that engagement with stakeholders, such as the RSPCA, on these aspirations will secure a local Animal Welfare policy which, accepting the defined role of the Council, can be presented for approval at a future meeting of the Executive and Council for formal adoption.

2.0 Horse Grazing on Council Owned Land

2.1 The Council owns a number of sites currently used for horse grazing.

2.2 Sites are currently in use at Parvis Road adjacent to the M25 at Byfleet, land at Hunts Farm, Rectory Lane, and at the rear of Fullerton Road. Historically, land at Saunders Lane (Mayford) has also been used for grazing. In addition there is separate conservation grazing at four heathland sites – Brookwood Heath, Prey Heath, Smarts Heath and Sheets Heath.

2.3 At Prey Heath and Sheets Heath we pay Surrey Wildlife Trust for use of their cattle for conservation grazing. Conservation grazing on public land needs to be managed very carefully, and we do not currently have the in house expertise to manage such operations. With the exception of our heathland, our other public green spaces are unlikely to be suitable, whether due to size, existing use, or designation e.g. Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG).

2.4 The approach to date has been to ensure that where the Council has land available which is suitable to be grazed the Council let it under licence, which avoids the Council picking up the costs for maintenance and security.

2.5 There are locations such as Havering Farm where the Council has no permitted grazing at present but where the Council is spending monies on stock fencing and installation of a water supply to enable grazing to take place. Part of this new grazing is to be offered to Surrey Wildlife Trust and the remainder will be kept to provide future grazing need.

2.6 Other locations such as Saunders Lane will need some further expenditure to improve/replace the stock fencing once the current illegal occupation is resolved, this will free up a further site.

2.7 There is a standard licence which includes clauses relating to animal welfare. The licence does need to be strengthened in respect of animal welfare.

2.8 The annual fee is usually £100 per annum. The licensee takes on the full maintenance responsibility for maintaining fencing, provision of water and shelter for the horses. This includes maintenance of the land including eradication of any invasive species such as ragwort.

3.0 Public consultation

3.1 With the agreement of the Executive it is proposed to consult using the draft document at Appendix 1 of this report and to engage on the wider aspirations to further our commitment to the promotion of animal welfare and protection from harm.

3.2 Feedback will be reported to a future Executive meeting when the Council will be asked to formally approve a local Animal Welfare Policy.

4.0 Corporate Strategy

- 4.1 An updated Animal Welfare policy will help to achieve the corporate objectives through joint working with partners, protecting the environment and promoting health and wellbeing for all.

5.0 Implications

Finance and Risk

- 5.1 An additional Animal Welfare resource is indicated to support the Council's responsibilities. Further information on costs will be presented following the completion of the proposed consultation and in light of the expectations set out in the local Animal Welfare Policy.

Equalities and Human Resources

- 5.2 It is anticipated that the work required to prepare the Animal Welfare Policy will be accommodated within existing resources. The Council will consider securing a dedicated Animal Welfare post, potentially as a shared resource with other local councils. The additional and dedicated resource would assist delivery of further sites, support animal welfare and assist in dealing promptly with any future occurrences of licence breaches.

Legal

- 5.3 There are no specific legal implications or risks identified within the report.

6.0 Engagement and Consultation

- 6.1 It is proposed to consult widely through the Council's new community engagement channels before reporting back to a future Executive.

REPORT ENDS