

## **WIRRAL COUNCIL**

### **COUNCIL MEETING, 13 DECEMBER 2010**

#### **REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF LAW HR AND ASSET MANAGEMENT**

#### **PETITION: TO HELP IMPROVE BIRKENHEAD COUNCIL KENNELS**

##### **1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1 This report is to advise Members of progress in respect of a petition presented to Council by Councillor Gill Gardiner that requested that conditions be improved at the Council kennels.
- 1.2 Council is requested to note and endorse the progress made in responding to the matters raised by the petition.

##### **2.0 BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 At the meeting of Council on July 12, 2010, a petition containing 3589 signatories and 600 online signatories was presented by Councillor G Gardiner.
- 2.2 The Animal Control and Welfare Section manages a kennel facility comprising two kennel blocks, accommodating some 40 plus dogs, an isolation block, and an office building located in Corporation Road, Birkenhead. The premises were originally built as the Birkenhead Council Disinfestations Unit in 1845 and are now over 150 years old.
- 2.3 The Section deals with up to 1000 stray dogs per year and houses up to 40 dogs at any one time. The majority of dogs are kept at the kennels for a statutory period of 7 days after which time they are re-homed.
- 2.4 The care and service provided at Wirral Council's kennels have been awarded the RSPCA Community Animal Welfare Stray Dog Gold Footprint award. The award is only handed to those local authorities who have clear procedures in place that ensure both the welfare of the dogs and a consistency of service
- 2.5 The Footprint recognises the importance of information and education and rewards authorities who actively promote schemes and services that may reduce the number of long-term strays and straying in the first instance, such as microchipping and neutering.
- 2.6 The petition seeks that conditions be improved the Council kennels by:-
  - i. Creating a 'run', where dogs can be exercised.
  - ii. Fitting new gates to the kennels to let the dogs feel less isolated.
  - iii. Windows in the roof of the kennels, to allow daylight.
  - iv. Warm bedding. The kennels are made of cold grey concrete, and though they are kept clean and washed regularly, they are often cold and damp.

- v. A regular spot in the local paper, listing the dogs that need new homes?

### **3.0 REPORT OF PROGRESS**

- i. Creating a 'run', where dogs can be exercised.

The existing premises are extremely limited for space given the number of dogs held and provision for creating runs is therefore very limited. Eight kennels were altered to allow access to a small external run in 1991. Space in the yard serving the kennels and office block is often restricted by service vehicles. The yard provides the only means of public access and vehicles, visitors and members of the public are often in close proximity. A large container unit is also positioned in the yard to provide extra storage for blankets etc further restricting space. Whilst kennel staff do take time to interact with dogs on an individual basis interaction between dogs 'social time' is avoided in order to reduce cross infection from stray dogs which may not be fully vaccinated and therefore at higher risk of carrying disease.

- ii. Fitting new gates to the kennels to let the dogs feel less isolated.

The current gates are purposely enclosed at lower level to reduce the risk of cross infection from stray dogs which may not be fully vaccinated and therefore at higher risk of carrying disease.

- iii. Windows in the roof of the kennels, to allow daylight

New roofs with skylights were fitted along with new external insulated wall cladding in 1997. The roof lights have recently been jet washed to improve natural lighting in response to the petition.

- iv. Warm bedding

The kennels are made of cold grey concrete, and though they are kept clean and washed regularly, they can at times be cold and damp. Provision of low level heating in each individual kennel cubicle is impracticable however new high level radiators were provided in 1997.

Blankets regularly donated by the general public are provided in each kennel and are replaced at least once and often twice daily.

- v. A regular spot in the local paper, listing the dogs that need new homes?

Numerous requests have been made to local newsgroups asking for a regular article highlighting kennelled stray dogs and these requests have continued following the petition. In the past however such requests have been declined. Local newspapers do occasionally include articles about activities at the kennels when these are topical and of broader public interest. The Council does however provide its own very popular 'lost and found' web page. Kennel staff work closely with local rescue groups and animal welfare charities to ensure as many stray dogs as possible are returned or re-homed. The service has one of the highest re-homing rates in the country consistently above 80%

### **3.1 Meeting with Petitioners**

In light of concerns raised by the petition, which was originally posted on 'the petition site.com', officers met with Gillian Montieth, the lead petitioner, in May 2010. As a result, a further meeting took place at Birkenhead Kennels with Gillian Montieth and Andrew and Angie Tucker representatives of a newly constituted group known as 'Friends of Birkenhead Kennels'. Councillor Gill Gardiner, Cabinet Member, Environment and Councillor Ian Lewis Cabinet Member for Community & Customer Engagement also attended.

The newly formed 'Friends of Birkenhead Kennels' group are keen to support improvements to the kennels and are active in seeking support to explore a the potential for a community partnership project to explore how a new kennel / animal welfare facility might be provided for the community at minimal cost to the Council.

In the shorter term officers have continued to meet and to liaise with Mrs Montieth on the matters raised by the petition and the friends group have since been successful in raising £5,845 through 'Funds for you' which is administered by the various Area Forums in Wirral. These resources are being used towards repainting internal kennel walls and improving flooring both to the main kennel block and the isolation kennel. The successful funding allocation was featured in an article on the Council web site in September.

#### **4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 Through "Funds for You" applications made by "Friends of Birkenhead Kennels", £5,845 was raised o be used to contribute to improvements at the kennels.

#### **5.0 STAFFING IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 There are no specific staffing implications arising from this report

#### **6.0 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS**

6.1 There are no specific equal opportunity implications arising from this report.

#### **7.0 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS**

7.1 There are no specific Community Safety implications arising from this report.

#### **8.0 LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS**

8.1 There are no specific Local Agenda 21 implications arising from this report.

#### **9.0 PLANNING IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 There are no specific planning implications arising from this report.

#### **10.0 ANTI-POVERTY IMPLICATIONS**

10.1 There are no specific anti-poverty implications arising from this report.

#### **11.0 SOCIAL INCLUSION IMPLICATIONS**

11.1 There are no specific social inclusion implications arising from this report.

## **12.0 LOCAL MEMBER SUPPORT IMPLICATIONS**

12.1 This report has implications for Members in all Wards.

## **13.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS**

13.1 None

## **14.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

14.1 Council is requested to note and endorse the progress made in relation to the Petition as outlined in this report.