

**REVISED FEE STRUCTURE AND CHARGING POLICY FOR STRAY DOGS  
COLLECTION SERVICE**

Report of the: Head of Housing and Environmental Services  
Contact: Oliver Nelson  
Urgent Decision?(yes/no) No  
If yes, reason urgent decision required: N/A  
Annexes/Appendices (attached): None  
Other available papers (not attached): None

**REPORT SUMMARY**

**To determine a revised fee structure for the stray dog collection service and the policy for charging customers.**

**RECOMMENDATION (S)**

*Notes*

- (1) To adopt the revised fee structure as proposed in paragraph 3.1.**
- (2) Except where there is an outstanding amount owed from a previous seizure, and for cases of genuine hardship where payment is made during the day, to permit half the appropriate fee to be taken up front followed by the remainder taken by monthly direct debit over no longer than four months.**
- (3) To delegate to Officers the ability to waive or to vary the fee payable in individual circumstances where it is judged to be necessary.**

**1 Implications for the Council's Key Priorities, Service Plans and Sustainable Community Strategy**

- 1.1 The proper and efficient delivery of this service whilst maximising the amount of recovered money is relevant to the key priority of Managing our Resources.

**2 Background**

- 2.1 The Council has a long standing statutory responsibility for the seizure of stray dogs and the legal right to claim back the costs of doing so from the owner prior to release of the dog.

ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE  
7 JUNE 2016

- 2.2 For many years, the dog warden service has been contracted out. The most recent tendering exercise took place in 2015.
- 2.3 The change in price structure from the dog warden contractor plus the range of possible cost permutations now requires the fees charged to the customer to be varied.
- 2.4 Officers are also seeking authority to offer half up-front payment and half direct debit payments for cases of genuine hardship and a general authority to either wave or adjust the fees charged in applicable circumstances.

### 3 Proposals

- 3.1 To vary the fees and charges in line with the table below

<b>Service</b>	<b>Cost to the Council £</b>	<b>Proposed fee £</b>
Full Day Service	165	165
Day service (dogs taken back directly to owners and NOT booked in at dog kennel)	130	130
Full Night Service	270	216
Night Service (dogs taken back directly to owners and NOT booked in at dog kennel)	245	196

- 3.2 In the case of a night time seizure, it is proposed not to seek to recover the entirety of the costs but accept a fee which covers 80 percent of the costs. This is in recognition that to charge the full costs would be a barrier to payment and the risk that the dog will be abandoned with no prospect of any costs being recovered. Fees collected outside of office hours are taken by the dog warden contractor on behalf of the Council and feedback to date indicates any substantial increase the night time fee could result in conflict.
- 3.3 In cases of genuine hardship, it is proposed to offer the option of half the fee paid up front with the remainder paid by direct debit monthly over no more than four months. This option is only viable should the customer present during office hours as the dog warden contractor has no facility for setting up direct debits.
- 3.4 There are cases where the same dog again comes to the attention of the service without the owner having settled the amount from the previous seizure and/or cancels the direct debit leaving an outstanding debt. In these cases it is proposed not to offer the option of a phased repayment through direct debit but to require the settlement of the entire fee up front.

#### **4 Financial and Manpower Implications**

- 4.1 The budget for stray dog collection is £11,000 down from £15,000 in 2015-2016. The nature of the service is such that it is impossible to accurately predict the final expenditure but budgets are set taking into account the previous year's expenditure experience.
- 4.2 The income target is £3,500 down from £4,600 to reflect the anticipated decrease in activity.
- 4.3 By law, the Council can only recover reasonable costs and it is not possible to generate a profit from this service.
- 4.4 It has never been realistic to recover the full costs of this service owing to difficulties in collection and in the circumstances where the dog is not claimed, the Council must bear the full amount of the seizure and kennelling fees.
- 4.5 In principle the proposal to collect 80 percent of the costs of night time seizures represents a subsidy. However in practice the service has always operated at a loss for the reasons described above and these proposals offer a pragmatic solution to the problem of non-payment and abandonment of the animal which in the long term represent the greater drain on resource.
- 4.6 **Chief Finance Officer's comments:** The financial implications are set out in the body of this report. Budgets are reviewed annually as part of our estimates process with managers. Expenditure and income levels are reviewed and reported quarterly. The option for direct debit payment is intended to offer a more flexible and economical approach to recovering costs. This approach will be reviewed after its first year of operation should the decision be made to proceed.

#### **5 Legal Implications (including implications for matters relating to equality)**

- 5.1 The stray dog collection service is a legal requirement placed upon the Council which the Council discharges using an outside contractor.
- 5.2 **Monitoring Officer's comments:** None for the purposes of this report.

#### **6 Sustainability Policy and Community Safety Implications**

- 6.1 There are no implications for sustainability or community safety

#### **7 Partnerships**

- 7.1 There are no partnership implications arising from this report

## **8 Risk Assessment**

- 8.1 Failure to maintain effective arrangements for the seizure and collection of stray dogs would place the Council in breach of its statutory obligations and potentially lead to an increase in stray dogs roaming in the Borough.

## **9 Conclusion and Recommendations**

- 9.1 The stray dog collection service operates as a 24 hour a day service on an outsourced contract. The Council is entitled to recover all of its costs from the owners of the dogs. In reality it is never possible to recover all of the costs owing to non-payment. The proposals in this report seek to strike a balance between the maximum return for the Council whilst being sensitive to genuine hardship cases.
- 9.2 The Committee is asked to accept the recommendations in this report.

**WARD(S) AFFECTED: ALL**