

REPORT TO: BEST VALUE SUB-COMMITTEE - 26th FEBRUARY 2002

**REPORT ON: ENVIRONMENTAL AND CONSUMER PROTECTION DEPARTMENT
BEST VALUE REVIEW OF THE ANIMAL CONTROL SERVICE**

REPORT BY: CHIEF EXECUTIVE

REPORT NO: 153-2002

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 This report sets out the findings of the Best Value Review of the Animal Control Service provided by the Environmental and Consumer Protection Department.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 It is recommended that the sub-committee:

2.1.1 Agrees that the Animal Control Service should continue to be provided in-house by the Environmental and Consumer Protection Department.

2.1.2. Notes the Directors proposals for continuous improvement outlined in Section 13 of this report.

3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

3.1 The review accounts for 1% of the Departments revenue budget in the financial year 2001/2002 and 13% of the total expenditure planned by the Department this year.

4.0 DUNDEE 21 IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The Environmental and Consumer Protection Department is committed to sustainable development and is the lead Department responsible for the development of Dundee 21.

4.2 This review was undertaken from the perspective of Dundee 21 and is consistent with the key themes, in particular helping to ensure that health is protected by creating safe, clean, pleasant environments.

5.0 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The contents of this report are consistent with the Council's Equal Opportunities Policy.

6.0 DEFINITION OF SERVICE REVIEWED

6.1 The service reviewed is the Animal Control Service delivered by the Environmental and Consumer Protection Department.

6.2 The key areas of work provided are as follows: -

6.2.1 The collection and detention of stray dogs.

6.2.2 The investigation of dog fouling complaints, including the instigation of legal proceedings where appropriate.

6.2.3 The investigation of dog barking complaints.

6.2.4 The investigation of cat complaints, both feral and domestic.

6.2.5 The siting and erection of dog bins.

- 6.2.6 The issue of dog bags.
- 6.2.7 The delivery of educational talks to schools and community groups on responsible dog ownership.
- 6.2.8 The provision of a free advice service to citizens on all animal related queries and complaints.
- 6.2.9 Investigation of Animal Welfare issues.
- 6.2.10 Providing advice and assistance to other Council Departments and external agencies on animal related matters.
- 6.3 The staffing of the Animal Control Service is as follows:
 - 6.3.1 1 Animal/Pest Control Supervisor
 - 4 Animal Control Officers
 - 1 Animal/Pest Control Officer

7.0 JUSTIFICATION FOR REVIEWING THE SERVICE

- 7.1 The Environmental Protection Act 1990 imposes a statutory obligation on all Local Authorities to provide a service for the seizure and detention of stray dogs. As a result, the vast majority of Scottish Local Authorities provide an in-house animal control service providing an availability of information for benchmarking purposes. This service is also available within the private sector and therefore lends itself to market testing.

8.0 THE REVIEW PROCESS

- 8.1 The Review Team consisted of John Black, Review Team Leader (from Personnel & Management Services dept.), Stewart Ball, Lead Officer (from Environmental and Consumer Protection) and Team Members Brian Gilmour (from Environmental and Consumer Protection) and Colin Bruce (from Finance)
- 8.2 The Best Value Review was conducted in line with Dundee City Council's Best Value Submission which was accepted by the Secretary of State for Scotland in 1997.
- 8.3 The Review was carried out by identifying the critical success factors relating to the provision of an Animal Control Service to the citizens of Dundee, identifying a program of continuous improvement, and carrying out an option appraisal.

9.0 CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS

9.1 Stakeholders.

- 9.1.1. Stakeholders identified were Council tenants, private tenants, owner occupiers, elected members, animal charities and a number of other Council Departments, primarily Housing, Leisure and Parks and Education.
- 9.1.2. No charge is levied for this service.

9.2. Critical Success Factors

- 9.2.1 A consultation exercise was undertaken to establish critical success factors for the service, and also as a method of performance appraisal.
- 9.2.2 Consultation took the form of a questionnaire which was sent out to all the Area Housing Managers, along with the last 250 customers who had made use of the Animal Control Service. Their replies were analysed to establish their views and opinions relating to the Animal Control Service.

- 9.2.3 The key critical success factors were established as response time, quality of the service provided and the successful resolution of the complaint.
- 9.2.4 Response time was clearly identified as an important critical success factor and can be defined as the time taken between the complaint being made and the initial contact from the Animal Control Officer.
- 9.2.5 Quality of service was highlighted as a concern and is identifiable as:
- Keeping the stakeholder informed of progress being made with the complaint.
 - Informing the stakeholder why a certain enquiry could not be resolved.
 - Staff being efficient, friendly and polite.
- 9.2.6. The successful resolution of the complaint was obviously seen as important by the stakeholder and can be defined in a number of different ways depending on the nature of the complaint, and the expectation of the stakeholder.

10.0 PERFORMANCE REVIEW

- 10.1 A number of additional questions relating to our current performance were asked in the Questionnaire used to establish the critical success factors. Responses to these questions were analysed and used to assess performance in certain key areas.
- 10.2 The Department received an overall return rate of 43% from the questionnaires sent out. 80% of people returning the questionnaire declared themselves either very satisfied or satisfied with the service they received from the Department. 86% of returns were either very satisfied or satisfied with the time taken to respond to complaints and 94% agreed that the Animal Control staff were friendly and polite.
- 10.3 Some weaknesses were brought to light, and these are outlined in Section 13 of this report, where areas for continuous improvement have been identified. A full breakdown of the findings of the consultation exercise is contained in the Best Value Audit file.

11.0 RESULTS OF COMPARISONS

- 11.1 The Environmental Protection Act 1990, imposed a duty on all Local Authorities to provide a service for the seizure and detention of stray dogs. For this reason, all Local Authorities must provide an Animal Control Service of sorts ranging purely from the collection of stray dogs, to the comprehensive service provided by Dundee City Council as outlined in Section 6 of this report.
- 11.2 The range of functions provided by individual councils is largely dependent on factors such as population spread, housing density and public demand. The level of service provided must take account of local needs, and locally experienced problems, which in turn gives rise to a wide variation in the nature of the service provided across the country. For this reason it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to directly compare or evaluate the service provided by one council with another.
- 11.3 A simple exercise was carried out to compare staffing costs with selected other Local Authorities throughout Scotland. The full details of this survey are contained in the Best Value Audit File, but it was found that our costs were on a par with most other Councils, and in some cases were considerably less.
- 11.4 There are a limited number of private companies in the U.K. who are prepared to offer a contracted out dog warden service for Local Authorities. These companies were contacted as part of this review, and indicative prices were sought to provide a similar level of service to that currently provided in-house.

11.5 One company was prepared to provide information upon request, but could only provide an approximate price without going out to formal tender. The price indicated and information supplied are included in the Best Value Audit File, but maintaining the service in-house would save the Council approximately £3250 per Officer per year.

12.0 OPTION APPRAISAL

12.1 The final stage of the review was to carry out an option appraisal.

12.2 The following options were considered:

- a) Prepare a specification for the work currently undertaken in-house and invite formal tenders from companies in a position to provide a comparable service.
- b) Identify an element of the service that could be provided externally and seek prices for that element alone.
- c) Retain the service in-house and implement the recommendations outlined for continuous improvement.

12.3 During the review process, the Department contacted a company capable of providing a similar level of service to that currently provided in-house. The cost indicated for provision of that service was higher than the present cost of maintaining the service in-house.

12.4 While it would be possible for a private sector company to provide a stray dog service, other important elements of the service, particularly in relation to dog fouling and barking would be lost. These elements of the service are valued highly by the citizens of Dundee, and account for over 75% of complaints received.

12.5 A major consultation exercise recently carried out by the Council using the "Priority Search" technique, showed that overall dog fouling came out 9th in people's list of priorities. This was from a list of 30 items, and showed that dog fouling ranked above concerns such as improved housing maintenance and street lighting.

12.6 Feedback from Neighbourhood Forums and Neighbourhood Service Teams continually highlight dog fouling as one of the main topics of concern for local residents.

12.7 Such is the importance attached by the Council to the success of the dog fouling initiative, that an internal performance indicator has recently been introduced to measure the weight of dog faeces collected from the dog waste bins each month. This performance indicator forms part of the Councils Corporate Plan, and a target increase of 5% is attached to this figure each year.

12.8 The high level of stakeholder satisfaction expressed during the consultation process showed that customers are currently happy with the level of service provided by the Department.

12.9 Retaining the service in-house and adopting the recommendations for continuous improvement would therefore offer the Council and the Citizens of Dundee "Best Value".

13.0 CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT PROPOSALS

13.1 Response Time

13.1.1 There are currently no performance indicators relating to the response times for animal control complaints. In order to measure response times, and set targets for future improvement, a set of performance indicators will be introduced. These will be as follows:

Stray dog	Response within 1 hour of complaint.
Dog Fouling	Response within 48 hours of complaint.
Dog Barking	Response within 24 hours of complaint.
Miscellaneous	Response within 72 hours of complaint.

13.1.2 Initial targets have been set for performance in each category which will be appraised in April 2002. These targets are as follows:

Stray Dog	100% responded to within target time.
Dog Fouling	95% responded to within target time.
Dog barking	90% responded to within target time.
Miscellaneous	90% responded to within target time.

13.2 Quality of Service

13.2.1 The customer satisfaction survey revealed that there were some areas where the quality of the service currently provided could be improved. Quality was defined as keeping the customer informed of the progress being made with their complaint, explaining why certain individual complaints could not be resolved and the efficiency of animal control staff.

13.2.2 The survey showed that 62% of customers felt they were kept informed of the progress being made with their complaint. Through a program of staff training, and improved record keeping, a target has been set to improve performance in this area to 75% by December 2002.

13.2.3 Experience has shown that in a considerable proportion of animal control complaints, no successful resolution can be found. This can be due to a variety of reasons, but from the perspective of customer satisfaction, it was felt important that these reasons should be explained in full to the person making the complaint. The customer survey revealed that only 51% of people whose complaints could not be resolved to their satisfaction were given a suitable explanation. Through staff training, a target has been set to raise performance in this area to 65% by December 2002.

13.2.4 The customer survey showed that 88% of people agreed that the Officers were friendly and polite, while 81% agreed that they handled their complaints efficiently. Through a program of staff training, the introduction of performance indicators and improvements to the requests and complaints system, a target has been set to improve performance in these key areas to 90% and 83% respectively by December 2002.

13.3 Resolution of Complaints

13.3.1 The current legislation, particularly in relation to dog fouling, makes it extremely difficult to obtain a successful resolution to every complaint received. This legislation is currently under review by the Scottish Parliament, and changes are being considered that will improve the powers available to Local Authority Officers. Representatives from Dundee City Council are actively involved in the consultation process, and it is anticipated that amendments to the current legislation will be in place by April 2003.

13.3.2 In the meantime, through an exchange of information with other local authorities, and a program of staff training, a target has been set to improve performance in this area from 65% to 70% by December 2002.

14.0 CONSULTATION

14.1 The Directors of Environmental and Consumer Protection, Finance and Corporate Planning have been consulted on this report.

15.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

15.1 None.

16.0 SIGNATURE

Chief Executive

Date –