



Report of the Director of Neighbourhoods and Housing

Executive Board

Date: 24th January 2006

Subject: Pets in Council houses policy – Deputation report

Electoral Wards Affected:

All

Specific Implications For:

Equality and Diversity

Community Cohesion

Narrowing the Gap

Eligible for Call In

Not Eligible for Call In

(Details contained in the report)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A number of animal welfare charities made a deputation to Council on 1 November 2006 highlighting problems with animal welfare, particularly in council homes. They are seeking greater partnership working with the Council and its Arms Length Management Organisations (ALMOs) to promote better care for animals by tenants. As a result, Strategic Landlord Group will ensure that the ALMOs work more closely with animal welfare organisations to alleviate animal cruelty, and undertake enforcement measures where appropriate. Such action is timely, as the Animal Welfare Act comes into force in April 2007. This legislation emphasises the prevention of animal cruelty, and makes more penalties available for use by enforcement agencies.

1.0 Purpose Of This Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform Executive Board of the Council's policy for pets in Council homes, and of the more proactive role it will take in partnership working with animal welfare organisations.

2.0 Background Information

- 2.1 At the November Council meeting, a number of animal welfare charities led by Cats Protection presented a deputation outlining the problems caused by abandoned and unneutered cats in Leeds, and claimed that the majority of these were found in council homes or housing estates. They provided a list of case studies where a lack of appropriate care for the health and welfare of cats had led to neglect, and highlighted the lack of management of numbers of cats in households.

3.0 Main Issues

- 3.1 The Cats' Protection League informed the Council of the problem created by abandoned and unneutered cats in Leeds. They have spent over £100,000 on providing care for cats, often in council properties or estates.
- 3.2 Cats Protection believe that there are many council houses in which the number of pets grows due to lack of management and intervention, such as neutering. Large numbers of cats or dogs within a property create an unhealthy environment, and can cause damage to the property. They can also lead to a neighbour nuisance problem.
- 3.3 A survey of the Leeds ALMOs found that there are many examples of partnership working with animal welfare organisations, and appropriate enforcement measures are being undertaken where known cruelty to animals occurs. However, closer partnership working and stronger enforcement will be undertaken to prevent cruelty or neglect in the future.
- 3.4 The Animal Welfare Act comes into force in April 2007. This Act is the most significant animal welfare legislation for nearly a century. It aims to:
- reduce animal suffering by enabling preventive action to be taken before suffering occurs;
 - place a duty on people who are responsible for domestic and companion animals to do all that is reasonable to ensure the welfare of their animals; and
 - deter persistent offenders by strengthening penalties. These include prison sentences, large fines, and disqualification from keeping pets.
- 3.5 As a result of the Deputation, the Executive Member for Neighbourhoods and Housing met with representatives from Cats' Protection in December 2006, and agreed that:
- The council will review its policy on Pets in Council housing in light of the Animal Welfare Act and amend its tenancy agreement as appropriate. The review will be completed before the Act comes into force in April 07.
 - The council, through the ALMOs' and the Leeds Tenants' Federation's newsletters, will promote responsible care of domestic and companion animals. Furthermore, ALMOs will be asked to promote animal welfare organisations' awareness campaigns.
 - ALMOs will work in partnership with animal welfare organisations to promote neutering services.

- ALMOs will develop better working relationships with animal welfare organisations to prevent animal welfare, and assist in tenancy enforcement when necessary. For example, ALMOs should ask animal welfare organisations to remove animals where there is cruelty, and assist such organisations operating mobile neutering services.

3.6 In addition, the policy will be amended to explicitly include the provisions of the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991. Should a tenant be found to keep a dangerous dog as defined in the Act, then tenancy enforcement action will be taken and referrals to Social Services will be made, if children are put at risk.

Implications For Council Policy And Governance

3.7 The Tenancy agreement states that:

3.8 “You (or anyone living with you or visiting the property) must not keep any animal in or near the property except if this is permitted by the Council Policy on Pets in Council houses. Even if the Policy allows you to keep an animal you must not allow it to annoy or frighten other people and you must keep you animal in a reasonable manner and under control. It must not damage Council property.”

3.9 The key points of the Pets in Council Homes policy are:

- Properties with communal entrances, such as flats and certain sheltered accommodation, are unsuitable for keeping pets such as cats and dogs.
- Tenants are allowed to keep small domestic pets, such as rabbits, rodents, fish, caged birds, non venomous insects and small non venomous reptiles or fish. In addition, tenants may keep a maximum of 2 dogs and / or 2 cats.
- Support dogs, such as guide dogs, are permitted.
- Tenants are expected to keep domestic pets in a responsible manner, and exercise control over them at all times.
- When a new tenant moves in, they will be advised on any restrictions on pets in that property.

3.9.1 When properties are advertised through the Lettings process, customers are advised in the advert whether pets are allowed in that property.

4.0 Legal And Resource Implications

4.1 There are no legal and resource implications

5.0 Recommendations

5.1 That Executive Board approve the actions stated in 3.5 and 3.6