

Dog warden out of hour's service
(Report produced by Jon Hamlet 18.11.2019)

Previous position

The stray dog warden service was previously undertaken by the EHO's of the pollution and Food Health and Safety Team with the dog wardens only on call for 2 hours each day at the weekend to transport any collected dogs from the holding kennels to the boarding kennels. During the working week no stray dog service was provided after 7pm with members of the public advised to hold on to the dog until the following working day. At the weekends the EHO would meet the finders at the holding kennels at Weeley (9-5 only). The dog wardens would then transport the dog onward to the boarding kennels as part of their 2 hours.

As part of the consultation in 2017/18 each department became responsible for their OOH service. With stray dogs, fly tipping affecting public access or public health and dead animals (seals etc.) falling under the remit of the Street Scene department.

Current position

Since the changes to the out of hours service (OOH) in April 2018 the waste out of hours service, which is predominantly stray dogs has been operated by the two dog wardens on a week on week off rota, 24 hours a day 7 days a week. The out of hour's dog warden service is a busy service with over 70 call outs since August 2018 (average of 1 per week) and over 100 calls from Careline since August 2018. Various attempts have been made to recruit additional staff to assist in this out of hour's service but with the workload combined with the potential for conflict no additional personnel have volunteered for the OOH service. Consequently the OOH service has become unsustainable to maintain based solely on the two dog wardens.

Additionally one of the dog wardens is leaving the post on 29th November to commence as a Technical Officer with the pollution control team, consequently until the position has been filled and the new Dog Warden has been trained there will only be one fully trained and qualified dog warden and in line with the working time directive can only cover the OOH service every other week. This will take effect from Monday 9th December.

Compounding this pressure upon the service is Universal Credit. The remaining Dog Warden is in receipt of Universal Credit, however undertaking the additional hours of the OOH service results in leaving the Dog Warden significantly financially out of pocket and as such he has given notice to quit the OOH service which again will take effect on Monday 9th December.

The OOH service in summary will be fulfilled until Monday 9th December, after this date there will be no cover for stray dogs. The OOH service also covers fly tipping, reports of sharps and dead animals (predominantly dead seals) however these occasions which requires an Officer to attend are much fewer in numbers compared to stray dogs but would still need to be covered, either by another OOH service, passing directly to the contractor or on a temporary basis covered by the Street scene manager to assess the call out frequency.

Service provided by other authorities

The majority of authorities within Essex provide a 24 hour out of hour's stray dog service with the finder to drop off the dogs direct to the kennels.

Colchester BC does not provide a stray dog service out of hours.

Castle Point and Epping Forest are Office hours and weekend office hours only.

Our contractor currently does not provide a service whereby members of the public can deliver stray dogs direct to them. Historically there have been issues surrounding conflict associated with members of the public turning up at the kennels to collect their dogs with staff being assaulted.

However informal talks have taken place with our current contractor, Hiskeys who are also a licenced commercial boarding kennels. Their current opening hours for this aspect of their business is 8am to 7pm seven days a week and they have indicated that they would be willing to operate these same hours for members of the public to deliver stray dogs direct to them. This in practice would be via Careline and Hiskeys would require to be contacted by Careline beforehand to that they can expect the member of public.

Hiskeys are again in principle willing to provide this service at no additional cost to the authority (currently £17.50 per dog per night and £35 for first 24 hours)

Whilst interest will be sought from potential alternative kennels for this option, it should be noted that we remain in contract with Hiskeys until 30th November 2020.

Impact

From Monday 9th December there will be no waste OOH service; this will impact the dog warden service with immediate effect, whilst the OOH service also incorporates fly tipping, sharps and dead animals etc. these call outs are minimal and could be absorbed by potential other means as mentioned above.

Members of the public finding a stray dog will be informed to hold on to the dog until the next working day upon which the dog warden will collect in office hours. This will have maximum impact at the weekend as practically the finder will be requested to hold on to the dog until Monday morning.

Even with the introduction of a replacement dog warden the OOH service is not sustainable as with the impact of Universal credit the existing dog warden has given notice to quit the OOH service.

It should also be recognised the level of commitment the two dog wardens have provided in continuing the OOH service since July 2018.

Fundamentally it is an OOH service that is compared to other services in high demand. It should also be recognised that the authority has limited resources and the services that we provide have to reflect these resources.

Proposal

Based upon the formal acceptance of our boarding kennel contractor to accept stray dogs direct from members of the public between 8am to 7pm:

- From Monday 9th December members of the public who contact Careline before 7pm will be advised to deliver the dog direct to the boarding kennels, if after 7pm they will be advised to hold on to the dog until the next working day upon which a dog warden can then collect the dog within normal working hours. (previous arrangements)
- Members of the public who contact Careline at the weekend (after 4.45pm Friday) will be advised to deliver the dog direct to the boarding kennels between the hours of 8am and 7pm
- In both instances finder details will be taken by Careline and Careline to contact Hiskeys boarding kennel immediately to advise of incoming stray dog delivery.
- The boarding Kennels will then take the finders details and complete the necessary stray dog paperwork on behalf of the dog wardens
- Careline to be provided with contact details for Hiskeys Boarding Kennels.

Impact and Risks

- Finders of stray dogs may not be willing or able to transport the stray dog to the kennels; an Equality Impact Assessment is attached.
- The authority will not be held responsible for any damage caused by the stray dogs whilst being transported by the finders.
- All costs of boarding kennels will be passed on to the owners or the authority if no owner; no change to current situation.
- This will reduce the amount of dogs being held in the authorities holding kennels.