

Animal Welfare Charter Sub-Committee – 10 November 2003

Minutes of the meeting of the **Animal Welfare Charter Sub-Committee** held on **10 November 2003** when there were present:-

Cllr Mrs M J Webster (Chairman)

Cllr Mrs T J Capon

Cllr Mrs S A Harper

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs R A Amner and J R F Mason.

OFFICERS PRESENT

G Woolhouse	- Head of Housing, Health & Community Care
S Clarkson	- Head of Revenue & Housing Management
S Crowther	- Principal Contract Monitoring Officer
G Dawson	- Senior Monitoring Officer/Parks Officer
C Thomas	- Emergency Planning & Health & Safety Manager
H Meggison	- Environmental Health Assistant
S Worthington	- Committee Administrator

7 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllrs Mrs S A Harper and Mrs M J Webster have provided the Committee Section with a list of interests with respect to this Sub-Committee.

8 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 29 September 2003 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman, subject to it being noted that the issues of circuses and fox hunting had not yet been discussed by this Sub-Committee, but would be addressed at a future date.

9 ANIMAL WELFARE CHARTER

Pets In Sheltered Housing Schemes

Officers circulated to Members of the Sub-Committee some background information relating to pets in sheltered housing schemes.

This Authority currently accepts tenants with small pets and caged birds in sheltered housing schemes and this has been the case for some years.

A Sub-Committee was tasked with examining this policy in 1999. The results of a tenants' survey conducted at that time revealed that tenants did not want larger pets like cats and dogs in sheltered housing schemes. The bungalows and flats at Francis Walk and Crown Hill which had been run as a sheltered scheme in the past had the largest acceptance rate for pets, with Romney House in Rochford

having the next highest acceptance rate.

The Sub-Committee had explored the possibilities of 5 different options relating to pets in sheltered accommodation schemes: -

- 1 retaining the status quo
- 2 scheme pets: a named person would accept responsibility for an animal who would be available for all tenants living within the scheme.
- 3 integrated policy: some floors designated as suitable for pet owning tenants, usually ground floors.
- 4 mixed policy: some schemes accepting pets, some not.
- 5 no restriction on pets entering accommodation.

Tenants with pets are asked to sign and agree to pet owning tenants' contract conditions.

Officers confirmed that, of 127 applicants on the housing register for sheltered scheme accommodation, 17 owned cats and dogs and had indicated that they would wish to keep their pets. Of 49 applicants on the deferred housing register, 2 owned dogs. A leaflet about keeping pets in sheltered accommodation and about re-homing pets, based on best practice in other Authorities, and in liaison with the RSPCA, is sent out to all residents who are about to take up sheltered accommodation with the Council.

During debate, there was a general consensus that there would be merit in officers exploring the possibility of designating 2 of the sheltered housing schemes as restricted to pet-owning tenants. This should, however, be done in conjunction with the work of the frail elderly housing study.

Pets In Emergency Situations

Officers confirmed that the issue of how to deal with pets in emergency situations was included in the emergency planning agenda.

In emergency planning, the nature of emergency very much dictated the action taken: -

- 1) an emergency situation that could be predicted in advance, such as flooding

In this kind of situation a measured view could be taken on how to deal with pets. This Authority could find itself responsible for properties during the emergency while the owners were absent and would be possibly liable for the costs of rectifying any damage caused by animals left behind at the property. It was therefore in its interests to deal with pets, where this situation was identified to the Council at the time of, say, evacuation of residential premises. With the appropriate links engaged, this Authority could advise, for example, the farming community, to take early action with respect to the safety of animals.

Public expectations to long term rest centre accommodation during an emergency were high, favouring, for example, hotels to school halls. It was possible that hotels would not wish to take in pets during an emergency. If animals were taken to rest centres during an emergency, health and safety issues would arise unless on-site, and probably difficult to manage arrangements were made. This Authority would therefore liaise with the RSPCA, local kennels to find safe accommodation for pets during the emergency.

2) Urgent evacuation

In the event of, for example, a gas explosion, the main consideration would be for human safety. Unless owners declared their pets, animals would be missed; in practice this would mean consequence management for animals, once conditions were safe and practical.

During debate, concern was raised that the farming community may not have adequate forward planning for the safety of farm animals in emergencies. There was a general consensus that officers should write formally to the local NFU urging them to identify measures that could be taken to avoid drowning, particularly around environmental considerations.

It was similarly felt that the equine community would not know where to take horses in the event of an emergency. Officers would raise with the County Council issues associated with the farming and equine communities. It was further suggested that there would be merit in officers preparing a leaflet on the safety of animals in emergencies with a view to this being distributed throughout the various communities in the District.

Members believed that there might be merit in inviting representatives from the Environment Agency and DEFRA to attend a future meeting of this Sub-Committee to discuss flooding issues in more detail.

Parks/Open Spaces

This Authority makes minimum use of pesticides in public areas. Currently the only products used are glyphosate, on hard surfaces, 24:D – MCPA/mecoprop, a selective weed killer mixture used annually on sports pitches and dimilin, which is used on brown tail moth caterpillars.

As a result of European legislation, several pesticide products will be withdrawn from general use by the end of this year.

Members were concerned that residents should be properly advised about which products would be withdrawn from use and about the safe disposal of these products.

Work has been undertaken by this Council on the introduction of wildlife areas

within the District. Badgers' sets have been encouraged in Brooklands and on the Brooklands extension and grass cuttings left as bedding for the badgers. Signs would shortly be placed at Sweyne Park and other sites explaining to residents that the sites may appear untidy, but that this was due to an initiative aimed at attracting wildlife and wild flowers.

Planting of trees, hedgerows and shrubs is undertaken throughout winter in open spaces, which has the effect of developing wildlife and wildflowers in the District. Hedgerows also have a positive impact in that they protect residents' fences in areas bordered by open spaces and also help prevent graffiti. Extensive planting is also undertaken by the Council at sheltered accommodation sites.

Warning notices have been placed around the District warning dog owners to treat their dogs for worms. The greatest use of sports grounds and open spaces in the District is that of dog walking.

During debate, Members considered that the draft Charter should include a statement about the Council's commitment to positively developing wildlife and fauna by varied planting.

Resolved

That an item be placed in the next edition of *Rochford District Matters* and on the Council's website advising residents which pesticides would be withdrawn from use at the end of this year and how to dispose of these products safely.
(HHHCC)

Stray Dogs/Dog Fouling

Annually the Council receives around 50 reports of stray dogs. Council policy is to re-home unclaimed stray dogs. The Police would only become involved if the stray dog reported was dangerous. The Council has a contract with a local kennel, with a 24 hour call-out service.

Responding to a Member enquiry, officers confirmed that the Council keeps records of any dead cats found on highways within the District which are useful in the event of cat owners contacting the Council with enquiries about their pets.

The issue of dog fouling and education has arisen during the best value work with respect to public regulation, inspection and protection. To date, there have been no prosecutions relating to dog fouling offences in the District. The best value review will, however, recommend a more proactive approach that will involve parking enforcement officers gathering evidence of dog fouling with a view to prosecutions of persistent offenders. In tandem with this, the review will also recommend an educational programme relating to responsible dog ownership.

Exotics

Members reported on a site visit to the local exotics rescue centre. Various issues of concern had arisen with respect to exotics being released into open areas and owners selling exotics privately through newspaper advertisements, etc, which there would be merit in discussing in more detail at a meeting of this Sub-Committee. Officers would invite Ian Newby from the exotics rescue centre, to attend the next meeting of this Sub-Committee. Mr Newby would also be able to provide Members with information on the proper regulation of birds of prey.

Wind Farms

Members expressed concern about a recent Government announcement with respect to the expansion of wind farms; it was felt that this could have implications for the welfare and safety of birds. There was a general consensus that the Animal Welfare Charter should contain a statement that any proposal for a wind farm in this district would need to be treated with caution given the potential threat to the welfare of birds.

Angling

A concern was raised that lines and barbed hooks were occasionally left on the ground in the vicinity of the reservoir in Rochford.

Planning

Responding to a Member enquiry relating to the nature of training provided for Planning staff with respect to the consideration of the welfare of wildlife when working on various planning applications and on how the Local Plan made provisions for wildlife protection, it was agreed that the Head of Planning Services be invited to the next meeting of this Sub-Committee.

10 DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting was scheduled for Monday, 1 December 2003 commencing at 11.00am in Committee Room 3, Civic Suite, Rayleigh.

The meeting commenced at 10 am and closed at 12.02 pm.

Chairman

Date