

**Committee and Date**

**Audit Committee
20th July 2023**

Item

Public



Dog Warden Service

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Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder):	Richard Marshall		

1. Synopsis

The purpose of this report is to update members of the Audit Committee on developments within the Dog Warden Service and those measures being taken to address findings and recommendations of previous Audit reports

2. Executive Summary

Essentially previous audits identified the following issues with the service

- Procedural inadequacies for the management arrangements with Stray Dog provider Hillbrae and regarding invoice processing and maintenance of the Stray Dog Register
- No formally signed contract with the provider
- Requirement for a Full Management Review of the Service to determine a considered way forward to consolidate and improve the service

A full management review was completed during the winter 2022/23, details contained in the subsequent sections of this report. The review also acknowledged that many of the audit recommendations had been implemented and that a formal contract with provider Hillbrae, which started in April 2023 for the period of one year, would address those outstanding.

In response to the management review, customer enquiries and accusations that the Council was not taking sufficient enforcement against dog fouling a review of legislative

powers was also completed. The conclusions of review are also contained below in the body of the report, but importantly that both public education and enforcement are required to encourage responsible dog ownership to ensure residents who use public open space are kept safe.

2.1. **Strategic Plan - Implications**

- 2.2. Healthy Living – supporting residents to take responsibility for their dogs and the health of others, and preventing ill health
- 2.3. Healthy Economy – ensuring that Shropshire is a healthy destination for tourists
- 2.4. Healthy Environment – enabling safer communities by reducing anti-social behaviours and risk of harm from stray dogs
- 2.5. Healthy Organisation – ensuring Shropshire’s internal capacity and capability is complimented effectively by private sector providers and that internal resources are organised efficiently and effectively to take the necessary enforcement to encourage responsible behaviour

3. **Recommendations**

- 3.1. To note the contents of the report

Report

4. **Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal**

(NB This will include the following: Impact on Children and Vulnerable Adults, Risk Management, Human Rights, Equalities, Community and other Consultation)

- 4.1. The award of a new contract with Hillbrae has addressed Audit’s recommendations concerning a compliant contracting arrangement to collect stray dogs and this will help to discharge the council’s legislative obligations.

The service is also minded to implement legal powers to take enforcement action when required to encourage responsible pet ownership. Currently the council is vulnerable to challenge about the lack of enforcement and indeed has been criticised by the public that enforcement action hasn’t been taken. The report recommendations would therefore address any legal challenge and address any reputational issues associated with lack of enforcement.

5. **Financial Implications**

- 5.1. None

6. Climate Change Appraisal

6.1. None

7. Background

- 7.1. The audit service has undertaken three audits into the Dog Warden Service concentrating on how stray dogs were taken care of through internal and external arrangements. Recommendations were wide ranging and required procedural improvements.
- 7.2. Due to service pressures and various staffing issues within the wider service the audits were not given the attention needed to properly review how the control of stray dogs fitted within the Dog Warden service and council aspirations informed by the Strategic Plan. This has now been completed and as outlined in the report.

8. Additional Information

- 8.1. To address the audit findings a full management review was undertaken and reached the conclusions listed below.

That a formal contract with Hillbrae for a term of 12 months be confirmed, subject to contract exemption, and for the following reasons.

- That Hillbrae currently meet the Council's service requirements and that there are few other providers who can.
- That Hillbrae currently provides a similar service to Telford and Wrekin Council
- That there are concerns about the services that alternative providers deliver and that effort will be required to stimulate the market.

That a 12 month term will provide sufficient incentive for Hillbrae to improve their administrative support for the contract.

That the current service costs (£15-20k annually) are relatively small and represent a low risk financially.

Use of the contract will strengthen administrative arrangements for invoicing and keeping the Stray Dog Register up to date.

Reprocure the service at the end of the new contract term to address any VfM considerations.

That the council's legislative powers be reviewed and measures implemented to enable enforcement for the control of dogs and addressing dog fouling.

- 8.2. To strengthen the Council's enforcement powers it is proposed to implement a Public Space Protection Order for the council's geographic and administrative area and further to consider how effective and efficient enforcement, to prevent dog fouling can be introduced, This will be the subject of a further report to Cabinet in

the Autumn.

- 8.3. The review also considered that enforcement on its own wouldn't be sufficient to secure a change in attitudes and the behavioural change needed to address the volume of complaints about dog fouling in public areas. To meet this challenge, it was considered that a proactive public information campaign advising of health considerations, the impact of dog nuisance and the reasons for subsequent enforcement action would be more effective.

9. Conclusions

- 9.1. The review of the service has acknowledged that many of the previous audit recommendations have been completed and those outstanding have been addressed through the management review and formal award of a contract to provider Hillbrae. The review has also sought to further develop the Dog Warden service to address reported dog nuisance.
- 9.2. It has been concluded that both a public information campaign together with enforcement is likely to achieve the best results in terms of encouraging pet owners to act responsibly. This will help to protect those members of the public who use the Council's open recreation areas and their health from the adverse effects of dog nuisance.
- 9.3. The service development will enhance the Dog Warden service and provide strategic direction for the control of dogs and enforcement of nuisance behaviours
- 9.4. The conclusions reached are also considered to be ones that will best meet the themed aspirations of the Strategic Plan and align the service with the Plan.

List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)

Local Member:

Appendices [Please list the titles of Appendices]

Appendix 1 Dog Wardens Audit Report