

Place Select Committee
Review of Animal Welfare, Kennelling, and the Protection of Pets
Outline Scope

Scrutiny Chair (Project Director): Jim Beall	Contact details: Jim.beall@stockton.gov.uk
Scrutiny Officer (Project Manager): Michelle Gunn	Contact details: Michelle.gunn@stockton.gov.uk
Departmental Link Officer: Marc Stephenson	Contact details: Marc.stephenson@stockton.gov.uk
Which of our strategic corporate objectives does this topic address?	
<p>The review will address the following priority of the Stockton-on-Tees Plan:</p> <p>Priority Two – Healthy and resilient communities: we will ensure that our diverse communities can live happy and healthy lives, that we support those who are experiencing poverty. We will strive to ensure that our residents are resilient, independent and where ever possible, economically active. We will support residents to be safe and connected to each other in their homes and communities.</p> <p>Animal Welfare also has direct links into both the Partnership and Regeneration Missions of the ‘Powering our Future’ program.</p>	
What are the main issues and overall aim of this review?	
<p>As part of the Council's Environmental Health Service, the Animal Welfare Team performs several critical functions and interventions to protect the public, ensure the welfare of animals, and promote animal wellbeing, including the statutory control over stray dogs. The service has a strong track record of high-quality provision, receiving the RSPCA Gold Standard award annually since its inception and recently one of only a few local authorities nationally to receive the platinum award for continual excellent. In addition to our Council responsibilities, there is a short-term kennelling facility at the Security Centre, which is also utilised by the Police for housing dogs involved in daily operations, such as the arrest of suspects with dogs or the detention of dangerous dogs.</p> <p>The service currently receives an average of 700 requests per year with the demand for animal welfare services rising, both in the number of animals handled and the complexity of cases. This national trend is mirrored in Adult Social Care Services, where rehoming animals, particularly dogs, presents significant challenges for staff.</p> <p>In addition, the length of time that dogs are required to stay in long term kennelling provision is increasing while at the same time, the availability of long-term kennelling is becoming more limited, and the associated costs are escalating. This reflects similar issues faced by local authorities nationwide. The increasing costs are driven by factors such as rising operational expenses, stricter regulations, increase in veterinary costs and higher demand for kennelling services.</p>	

The review will therefore assess the long-term challenges and consider options for the future provision of animal welfare services, kennelling, and property protection. Key areas for consideration include:

1. **Financial Sustainability:** Exploring funding options and cost-saving measures to ensure the continued provision of high-quality animal welfare services.
2. **Capacity and Infrastructure:** Assessing the need for additional kennelling facilities or partnerships to accommodate the growing number of animals.
3. **Staffing and Training:** Ensuring our officers are adequately trained and supported to handle the increasing complexity of cases.
4. **Collaboration with External Agencies:** Strengthening partnerships with the Police, private kennelling providers, and other local authorities to share resources and best practices.
5. **Community Engagement:** Raising awareness and encouraging responsible pet ownership to reduce the number of stray and abandoned animals.

The overall aim of the review will be to address the challenges to the long-term sustainability and cost of services and thereby continue to provide excellent care for animals and ensure the safety and well-being of the community.

The Committee will undertake the following key lines of enquiry:

What is the minimum (statutory) service that the Council must provide?
What services are the Council providing above the minimum required and why?
What is the current position on “put to sleep”?
How effectively does the current service safeguard animal welfare?
How long are animals at council funded facilities?
How has demand for the service changed, e.g. number/complexity of cases, and what impact is this having on the service?
How is the service funded?
Are there any income-generation opportunities?
What current partnership arrangements are in place and how effective are these?
What are the options for increasing capacity to meet an increased demand? E.g. additional facilities, shared provision, alternative models?
What training is required for animal welfare officers?
Is additional training or support required to manage more complex and/or sensitive cases?
What public engagement is being carried out to promote responsible pet ownership and reduce abandonment and dangerous dog incidents? How effective are these?

Who will the Committee be trying to influence as part of its work?

Cabinet, Council, key partners e.g. police, other local authorities, public

Expected duration of review and key milestones:

7 months, reporting to Cabinet in January 2027

Scope and Project Plan –18 May 2026

Evidence gathering June 2026 – October 2026

<p>Draft recommendations – 9 November 2026 Final Report – 14 December 2026 Submission to Cabinet – 21 January 2027</p>
<p>What information do we need?</p>
<p>Existing information (background information, existing reports, legislation, central government documents, etc.):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statutory requirements • Existing policy/service <p>New information:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Best practice from across the country

Who can provide us with further relevant evidence? (Cabinet Member, officer, service user, general public, expert witness, etc.)	What specific areas do we want them to cover when they give evidence?
Animal welfare officers	Council responsibilities regarding animal welfare The current service offer including short-term kennelling facility and long-term kennelling arrangements The demand on the service Veterinary arrangements and cost Training received Funding of the service
Police	Police responsibilities regarding animal welfare The number of animals/dogs they deal with and kennel What happens in the long term to dangerous dogs and the animals of suspects they seize
Other local authorities	Best practice in providing animal welfare services and meeting demand for services Training provided for staff
Local Veterinary Services	Health implications for long term kennelling Veterinary costs
Dogs Trust	Demand for pets and issues with rehoming Partnerships with private kennels and Council
RSPCA	View on Council Animal Welfare provision Partnerships with private and Council kennels
Communications Officers	The communication strategies for promoting responsible pet ownership
<p>How will this information be gathered? (e.g. financial baselining and analysis, benchmarking, site visits, face-to-face questioning, telephone survey, survey)</p> <p>Committee meetings, reports, case studies</p>	

How will key partners and the public be involved in the review?

Attendance at meetings, information submissions

How will the review help the Council meet the Public Sector Equality Duty?

The Equality Act 2010 protects everyone from discrimination on grounds of nine Protected Characteristics (including – but not limited to – age, gender, disability, ethnicity), and advance equality of opportunity for those with Protected Characteristics.

Providing an effective animal welfare service ensures public safety of all residents by controlling stray and dangerous dogs, which reduces the risk of attacks and injuries. This fosters a sense of security and well-being among residents.

How will the review contribute towards the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, or the implementation of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy?

By reducing the risk of attacks and injuries and fostering a sense of security and well-being contributes to Focus Area 3: Everyone lives in healthy and sustainable places and communities.

Provide an initial view as to how this review could lead to efficiencies, improvements and/or transformation:

The review will be seeking to explore funding options and cost-saving measures, ensuring officers are adequately trained and supported, and strengthening partnerships to ensure the continuation of high-quality animal welfare services that is able to respond to the increasing complexity of cases.

It will also seek to raise awareness with residents and encourage responsible pet owners to reduce the number of stray and abandoned animals.

Project Plan

Key Task	Details/Activities	Date	Responsibility
Scoping of Review	Information gathering	April 2026	Scrutiny Officer Link Officer
Tri-Partite Meeting	Meeting to discuss aims and objectives of review	17.04.26	Select Committee Chair and Vice Chair, Cabinet Member(s), Director(s), Scrutiny Officer, Link Officer
Agree Project Plan	Scope and Project Plan agreed by Committee	18.05.26	Select Committee
Publicity of Review	Determine whether Communications Plan needed		Link Officer, Scrutiny Officer
Obtaining Evidence		15.06.26 13.07.26 14.09.26 12.10.26	Select Committee
Members decide recommendations and findings	Review summary of findings and formulate draft recommendations	09.11.26	Select Committee
Circulate Draft Report to Stakeholders	Circulation of Report	November/December 2026	Scrutiny Officer
Tri-Partite Meeting	Meeting to discuss findings of review and draft recommendations	November/December 2026 TBC	Select Committee Chair and Vice Chair, Cabinet Member(s), Director(s), Scrutiny Officer, Link Officer
Final Agreement of Report	Approval of final report by Committee	14.12.26	Select Committee, Cabinet Member, Director
Consideration of Report by Executive Scrutiny Committee	Consideration of report	19.01.27	Executive Scrutiny Committee
Report to Cabinet/Approving Body	Presentation of final report with recommendations for approval to Cabinet	21.01.27	Cabinet / Approving Body