

Place Select Committee

A meeting of Place Select Committee was held on Monday 15th June 2026.

Present: Cllr Jim Beall (Chair), Cllr Steve Nelson (Vice-Chair), Cllr Stephen Dodds, Cllr Sufi Mubeen, Cllr David Reynard, Cllr Tony Riordan, Cllr Marilyn Surtees, and Cllr Sylvia Walmsley.

Officers: Neil Bramma (Finance, Transformation and Performance) Stephen Donagahy, Polly Edwards, Graham Lyons, Sarah Garside (Adults, Health and Wellbeing), Michelle Gunn and Junita Agyapong (Corporate Services)

Also in attendance:

Apologies: Cllr Ted Strike

PLA/13/26 Livestreaming

The Committee noted the meeting was being livestreaming.

PLA/14/26 Evacuation Procedure

The Committee noted the evacuation and housekeeping procedure.

PLA/15/26 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

PLA/16/26 Minutes

AGREED the minutes of the meeting held on 18 May be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

PLA/17/26 Scrutiny Review of Governance of Capital Projects

The Strategic Finance Manager presented an action plan setting out how the agreed recommendations from the Scrutiny Review of Governance of Capital Projects would be implemented and target dates for completion. There were five recommendations, which included reviewing financial delegations, Cabinet report guidance and templates, and the approach to member engagement in relation to capital projects. There was also a commitment to carry out an officer review of the governance structure, reporting back to the Committee in January 2027.

A date for when refreshing the Concordat for Communication and Consultation with Councillors would be completed was requested. The Finance Officer would discuss with the Monitoring Officer and circulate a date to the Committee.

The Committee thanked the officer for the action plan.

AGREED that:

- the Action Plan be approved

- a deadline date for refreshing the Concordat for Communication and Consultation with Councillors be circulated
- a progress update be provided in January 2027.

PLA/18/26 Scrutiny Review of Animal Welfare, Kennelling, and Protection of Pets

The Committee received three reports for their review of Animal Welfare, Kennelling, and Protection of Pets. The Licensing Officer presented a report outlining the role and responsibilities of the Licensing Team regarding animals and how it supported animal welfare. The key points highlighted were:

- The Service was responsible for a range of activities involving animals under the Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (England) Regulations 2018 which included dog breeding, selling animals as pets, animal boarding and day care for dogs, hiring horses e.g. riding schools, and keeping or training animals for exhibition.
- The Service carried out a number of proactive measures such as pre-application advice and site visits. They also carried out assessments of suitability and competence and compliance as part of the application process. They ensured that operators were competent, trained and fit and proper to carry out their business, and that premises were safe, suitable and hygienic for the animals.
- Licences were granted for one, two or three years. Star ratings were given to licenced operators, and the length of licences given depended on the star rating of an operator, with lower star rated operators granted shorter licences. The star rating system not only gave transparency and assurance to the public but also encouraged operators to improve, driving up standards. In 2025-26 there were 83 licensed premises for animal activity and there were no one star operators in the Borough.
- Inspections took place at initial application and again roughly halfway through the licence, as well as unannounced compliance visits.
- The Service investigated complaints on both licenced operators and unlicensed activity. Enforcement actions that could be taken included refusing licenses, suspending licenses, formal warnings, improvement notices, reduction of star ratings or, for serious breaches, prosecution. Unlicensed activity mainly included dog breeding, as well as home boarding, where people were generally unaware of the legislation for this activity, and organised criminal activity.
- 133 inspections, investigations and advisory visits were carried out in 2025-26.
- The Service had a joined-up approach, working with colleagues from the Animal Welfare Team and Environmental Health as well as the RSPCA and veterinary professionals.
- Inspecting officers must be qualified inspectors, with the training included practical assessments. Any further updates on the training were also undertaken, e.g. primates training was carried out by one officer in November 2025 and the information and material was cascaded to other officers in the team.
- Dog walking was currently not included in the legislation however this was being discussed at a national level.

Capacity within the team was discussed with the Licensing Officer informing that there were three officers who were trained in this area of work, however other officers could be trained if needed.

Primate training was raised. A licence was needed to own a monkey, however there had been no applications for this licence in the borough, and the Service was not aware of any person who owned a monkey.

The list of fees for licenses was requested, along with clarification on whether these fees covered the cost of the service. The Licensing Officer would circulate this information. The number and types of operators for each star rating was also requested, along with the link to the register of licences on the website.

The type of activity that required a licence was discussed. It was noted that a licence was not needed if caring for a pet on behalf of a family member or friend while they were on holiday or sick. A licence was also not needed if your pet accidentally got pregnant and you gave the puppies/kittens away at a small cost. However, if you were carrying out a business of looking after or breeding animals for a profit, then a licence was needed. This advice was available on the website.

The Service Manager and Team Leader for Adult Social Care also presented a report which outlined how they carry out their responsibilities to protect the pets of vulnerable people who had been assessed as being unable to manage their financial affairs and had no family, friends or solicitor to assist them. The key points highlighted were:

- The Council had a responsibility to look after pets of vulnerable people who were admitted to hospital or 24-hour care under the Care Act 2014, the Children and Families Act 2014 (Consequential Amendments), and Animal Welfare Act 2006. If the person became a permanent resident in care or passed away, the Council would take reasonable steps to find the pets a suitable home.
- The majority of pets being looked after were dogs and cats, however the service had also looked after other animals which had included pet birds, fish, snakes, rabbits etc. The number of pets looked after in 2025-26 was 25, 15 dogs and 10 cats.
- A three-year contract with a kennel had been in place for three months, for five kennel spaces within that site which included two isolation spaces. The service tended to go over the contract at any one time due to the number of animals they were responsible for. The kennel also offered a level of in-home care when they were awaiting spaces. Prior to the contract, animals were placed in kennels on ad hoc basis. This was a different kennel to the one used by the Animal Welfare team.
- Isolation spaces were used when an animal was either not up to date with their vaccines or there was no proof of vaccine history. The animal would be in isolation for approximately two weeks whilst initial vaccines and booster vaccines were administered.
- The Council attempted to recover costs for looking after pets, invoicing monthly and ensuring that was paid when the Council had access to the owners' finances under their statutory duties. Where the Council did not have access to the owners' finances, an invoice would be sent once the animal had either returned home or had been re-homed.
- The length of time an animal would be accommodated was variable, from a couple of days to six months plus. There were some animals accommodated for a number of years, and this was usually because the owner retained capacity over their decision making and were unable to take the animal back but refusing to consent to re-home the animal. Animals would only be euthanised on a vet recommendation, and involving the owner if they had the capacity, or the Assistant Director if the owner did not have the capacity to consent.

Members noted that Social Care officers did not have specialist training in animal welfare and questioned the support available in assisting their work. The Committee were informed that if they were going to be first in a property or if they had any concerns

regarding the animal within the property, they would contact the Animal Welfare Team. An officer from that team would offer advice. On questioning, Officers confirmed that aggressive animals had not been an issue so far but, if there was a case, a risk assessment would be taken to ensure the home was secure for care being provided in the premises.

The recovery of costs was discussed. It was explained that invoices were raised and Social Care would follow these up, however people often wouldn't engage. Debt recovery was now moving to the Corporate Debt Team when people did not engage and would be following the standard processes. It was hoped this would increase the amount being recovered for the service. In cases where an owner was unable to take the pet back but refusing for it to be rehomed, the social worker would try to emphasize the best interests of the animal, but the Service had not overridden anyone's wishes. The Service was paying for kennelling upfront for these longer-term placements and would not invoice until the animal was no longer in the kennels.

Members questioned whether the service had animals that repeatedly needed their care and were informed that this did happen. The figures presented reflected each time an animal was in their care.

Members questioned the early intervention steps taken to prevent animals needing to be taken into Council's care. Officers informed that when assessments were carried out, contingency plans were put in place to ensure that in the eventuality a person needed to go into hospital or care a friend, relative or carer would be able to assist. In emergency situations, it was found that friends and family were quite helpful and willing to take in pets. When further questioned officers confirmed that they did not have a list of the people Adult Social Care supports who had pets and were unable to predict the number of pets they were likely to need to make provisions for.

It was noted that there were no care homes in the Borough that allowed pets to stay with their owners.

The Environmental Health Service Manager gave a verbal report regarding the work of the Animal Welfare Team. The key points highlighted were:

- The team sits within Environmental health, receives 1,300 service requests per annum, has high return to owner rates and incredibly low put to sleep rates. It works with partners to ensure animals were given every opportunity to be rehomed and the team had continuously received the RSPCA Gold Paw Print Award. The work of the team contributed to public safety by preventing possibilities of dog attacks, causing hazards, and/or nuisance behaviour,
- The duty to seize stray dogs was passed over to local authorities in 2008 and must carry out this duty 365 days a year. The Council also had the duty to ensure suitable facilities were provided for animals seized and welfare was addressed, keeping animals safely and humanely.
- When the service was unable to reunite a dog with its owner after seven days, the dog legally became the property of the Council and it was at this point the team would work with charity partners and behaviouralist to determine whether it could be re-homed.
- The team had links with the Police due to the partnership working required regarding dangerous dogs and assisting investigations. However, the Police were primarily responsible for enforcing laws under the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991.

- Promoting responsible dog and pet ownership played a vital role in improving both animal welfare and public safety, ensuring people understood their responsibilities and preventing dogs becoming stray. This included promoting vaccinations, neutering to avoid unwanted litters, and pet insurance to assist owners with the cost of rising vet fees. Unvaccinated animal was an issue for the team as they may need to be quarantined when in their care.
- The team had their own kennelling and cattery arrangements with increasing demands on the need for those services. It also had strong partnership with the Dogs Trust and other charities and wished to continue to keep those strong ties.
- Not all pet owners microchipped their pets, so if these pets got out and picked up by the service there were no details for the team to find. In addition, there was no centrally held database for microchips, and several private companies carrying out this service, so if a microchip was found the team may need to check several different databases to find the details. Once details had been found, these could be out of date, as the pet had changed owners and the details not updated.

Members questioned the responsibility for pets of individuals that had been taken into police custody or prison. The officer confirmed that this would be a police responsibility, who would need to ensure that the pets' safety and welfare was addressed, and returned to the owner when released. If the owner was not released, they would need to find a family member or friend to take the animal while they were being detained.

AGREED the information be noted.

PLA/19/26 Chairs Update and Work Programme 2026-2027

Consideration was given to the Work Programme.

Site visits to kennels used by Stockton Borough Council Animal Welfare and Adult Social Care services for the Scrutiny Review of Animal Welfare were discussed and it was agreed that these would be arranged.

AGREED the work programme be noted and site visits arranged.

Chair: