

Place Select Committee

A meeting of Place Select Committee was held on Monday 12th October 2026.

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

Officers: Sharon Boulton, Katie Chapel (Dog's Trust), Stephen Donaghy (Neighbourhoods), and Michelle Gunn (Corporate Services)

Also in attendance: Cllr Norma Stephenson

Apologies:

PLA/33/26 Livestreaming

The Chair announced to those present that the meeting would be live streamed.

PLA/34/26 Evacuation Procedure

The Committee noted the evacuation and housekeeping procedure.

PLA/35/26 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

PLA/36/26 Minutes

AGREED the minutes of the meeting on 14 September be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

PLA/37/26 Scrutiny Review of Animal Welfare, Kennelling, and Protection of Pets

The Committee received a presentation from the Operations Manager and Rehoming Manager of the local Dog's Trust, and key points highlighted were:

- Dog's Trust is a welfare charity that aims to be at the forefront of dog welfare in the UK, operating 22 rehoming centres and caring for approximately 11,000 dogs annually.
- The average stay in a Dog's Trust centre was 59 days, although this varied depending on the dog's age, health, and behavioural needs, with some dogs staying at a centre less than a week. It cost approximately £3,000 to care for and rehome a dog, while adoption fees were £300.
- The Sadberge centre, the nearest to Stockton-on-Tees, rehomed 653 dogs in 2025 and was on track to increase rehoming numbers by 27% in 2026, having rehomed 519 dogs by September.
- The centre received approximately 15 calls per day requesting rehoming from individuals, Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council, and other local authorities. Around a fifth of dogs rehomed at Sadberge were referred from Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council's Animal Welfare Service.

- Dog's Trust aimed to assess dogs for rehoming on the same day that Animal Welfare contacted them. They were then able to put plans in place to ensure there was space in the centre after the seven days they had been held by Animal Welfare, minimising kennelling costs for Animal Welfare and freeing up space for other stray dogs. Dogs from Animal Welfare were put into isolation for seven days and given a veterinary assessment and vaccinations.
- Assessment took approximately 10 minutes and included considerations of staff safety, how the dog would cope in kennels, and the dog's welfare, to ensure the dog could be safely rehomed.
- A matching process took place for rehoming, with those applying for a dog assessed to ensure dogs were placed with the most suitable owners for them. If there was no interest for a dog when they arrived at the centre, they would be advertised on the website.
- The centre had a fully equipped physio and hydrotherapy suite, which meant they could support dogs that had more specific health needs. They also had a veterinary suite on site to carry out minor operations such as neutering.
- The charity also offered:
 - A Home Stay service, supporting dogs to be rehomed directly from their existing homes, without entering kennels. This worked for straightforward cases where the dog was young, had no health needs, and therefore considered desirable.
 - A network of 1,700 foster carers who took dogs that had been assessed and were ready for rehoming but needed extra care that could not be provided in a kennel environment.
 - A post adoption support line.
 - Free online advice and behaviour support line which aimed to keep dogs in the home with their owners. The behaviour support line supported 9,000 dog owners in 2025.
 - A Canine Care Card scheme that dog owners could sign up to, whereby the dog would automatically go into the Dog's Trust care without going on the waiting list if the owner became unable to look after them.
 - Dog food banks for those who were struggling to feed their pet, whereby owners asked for "Rover" and were given access to the food they needed.
- Nationally, the Dog's Trust carried out research projects and campaigns to change dog laws, had pet friendly housing schemes, and supported domestic abuse survivors and people experiencing homelessness.
- Internationally, they had committed to help 3 million dogs globally each year, predominately by vaccinating against rabies and educating people about dogs.
- The charity did not receive government funding and therefore relied on donations, legacies, and fundraising such as community events and people participating in Great North Run etc. Only 2% of funding was from adoption fees. There was also a sponsor a dog scheme, whereby people paid a small amount each month for the care of a specific dog.

The Dog's Trust noted that they had an excellent working relationship with SBC's Animal Welfare Service, who they believed worked went above and beyond for the dogs in their care. They added if they were a stray dog they would like to be found in SBC area.

The centre's role in the community was discussed, and it was noted that they were open for members of the public to visit the centre, whether they were looking to adopt a dog or not. They never turned people away who needed food for their pet, and they

had partnerships with local supermarkets, Pets at Home and links with community groups to collect dog food.

Members questioned whether there were any trends in the breeds of dogs coming to the centre for rehoming. It was explained that they got a lot of lurchers and “staffies”, and these were the types of dogs that were being advertised on their website. Belgian Malinois were also a popular breed and therefore the centre was seeing more of these dogs which could be difficult to rehome. It was noted that not all dogs who needed rehoming were placed on the website as they may have already been matched and reserved by those wanting to adopt a dog. Therefore, the website was not a true reflection of the breed of dogs at the centre. It was further noted that the centre would take all dogs that they were able to rehome regardless of breed.

Breed advice was raised, and while advice was available, it was explained that Dog’s Trust encouraged those seeking a dog to come to the centre for assessment so they could be matched to a dog that suits their lifestyle. Once having the assessment, a person may realise a breed was not for them. Also, while there were some breed traits, each dog had its own individual needs.

Members further asked about the centre’s capacity and catchment area. There were 75 kennels, however some dogs could be placed in kennels together. At the time of the meeting they had 118 dogs in their care, 100 of those on site and the remaining in either foster care or Home Stay scheme. However, the number of dogs varies. Most dogs were from Darlington and Stockton area, but they also received requests from Newcastle and other parts of the country and accepted any dog that was able to travel to the centre. The next nearest Dog’s Trust centre was Leeds to the south and West Calder to the north.

Written evidence was circulated to the Committee for noting from the RSPCA who were unable to attend the meeting due to an urgent operational matter.

The Committee received a verbal report from the Environmental Health Manager regarding funding and potential models for operation, along with responsibilities for stray cats. This included:

- The Animal Welfare service received core Council funding to carry out its duties, which included statutory duties. They also received recovery costs when Animal Welfare carried out enforcement and/or legal action, however these were extremely limited. Licensing had income and recovery opportunities for the animal welfare services they carried out via licensing fees, which were regularly reviewed, while Adult Social Care sought to recover related costs for protection of pet duties from the owners.
- The Council sought external funding and grant opportunities where available, however these were also very limited for animal welfare activities.
- The funding received supported staffing and the specialist officers who undertook the work, investigations and enforcement, collection and kennelling, emergency animal accommodation, legal proceedings, training, equipment, and operation costs.
- The strong relationship the Council had with partner organisations, charities, kennel providers, and veterinary practices helped to minimise costs and officers were keen for these relationships to continue.
- There was a potential to explore joint procurement for kennelling, either with Animal Welfare and Adult Social Care, or in partnership with another local authority.

- Increased digitalisation of systems and efficiency measure aimed to make the service as effective as possible while keeping administrative costs low, and this included exploring updating online applications and self-service portals to increase capacity.
- Resources were focused on the highest priorities, whether that be premises for licensing activities or cases in animal welfare. Interventions where standards were consistently high were therefore reduced.
- Education, awareness, and early intervention were seen as keen to reduce demand for services.
- There was no statutory duty for local authorities to collect or accommodate stray cats. However, the Council had a cattery and historically helped to facilitate the rescue, neutering, and rehoming of cats, at a low cost and working with partner charities. They also offered advice and guidance to the public, referring people to Cats Protection, Blue Cross and RSPCA.
- In 2026 the Council had rehomed 61 cats: 39 through Blue Cross, 20 through the RSPCA hubs, and two kittens were rehomed directly through Council officers.
- Animal Welfare services were moving from their current site at 16 Church Road to the Security Centre, and there would no longer be space for a cattery at the new site. This facility would therefore be lost, unless alternative arrangements could be made.

Members questioned the contingency plans for stray cats if the cattery was lost and were informed that they would be working with charities, taking strays directly to them for rehoming.

AGREED the information be noted.

PLA/38/26 Chair's Update and Select Committee Work Programme

Consideration was given to the work programme

AGREED the work programme be noted.

Chair: