1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 To review the Council’s arrangements for the provision of boarding facilities for stray dogs.

1.2 To inform the Executive Member of the outcome of the procurement of a new contract for this service.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

Cabinet is recommended to approve:
2.1 That stray dogs are kept for not more than 8 days, except when legal obligations necessitate a longer stay.

2.2 That the contract duration is three years with an option for the Head of Environment to extend it by a further two years, subject to a review of prices with the contractor.

3. **BACKGROUND**

3.1 The Council has a statutory duty to deal with stray dogs. As well as collecting them during office hours, since April 2008 we have been required to provide a reception point out of hours for members of the public to hand in stray dogs.

3.2 The current contract for the boarding of all of our strays as well as the provision of a reception point expires in March 2013, after four years of operation.

3.3 The cost is approaching £2,000 per month, having increased three-fold in the past 4 years. The extended duty; replacing the Police role; as well as the recession leading to abandonments are likely causal factors in the increased cost. Government grant does contribute to the financing of “dog warden” duties.

3.4 The law allows us to levy a statutory fee of £25 plus our reasonable costs to anyone claiming a dog. However, as many dogs are unclaimed we cannot recover the costs associated with boarding them, caring for them and ultimately disposing of them as we see fit. The fees are considered in the annual report for environmental miscellaneous fees and charges and hence are not discussed further here.

3.5 The service is best delivered by a contractor capable of providing both the necessary facilities and the 24/7 “on-call” demands. A limited market both locally and national exist for such a service though many Councils are still able to work with animal sanctuaries with who are able to subsequently re-home many unclaimed dogs, avoiding the need to destroy them.

3.6 In March 2009 Cabinet resolved that the length of time a stray dog is kept by the Council be reduced from 10 days to 9 days.
4. **PROPOSED CONTRACTUAL CHANGES**

4.1 The law requires us to keep a stray dog for seven days from when it is received or from when notification to any known owner is given; whichever is the latter. Under the current contract we pay for nine days or part thereof. Most owners that claim their dog do so within four days. As such we are keeping dogs longer than is necessary. It is proposed that this be reduced to eight days. As approximately 100 dogs are unclaimed each year, this represents saving of £1,450 per annum.

4.2 It is further suggested that the contract duration is three years with an option to extend by a further two years. The previous contract was two plus two. Bidders agreed to fix their day rates for the duration of the initial contract in return for the longer commitment. It is, therefore, considered mutually advantageous to offer a contract for three years. At that time, rates would be renegotiated by officers for any extension, as happened previously.

4.3 It is recognised nationally and locally that a number of strays are actually abandonments. There are numerous reasons why people abandon their pet and some also are prepared to lose it rather than pay the fees for their safe return. There is very little we can do to prevent this but we do need to control the costs due to our own budgetary pressures.

4.4 A number of these dogs exhibit behavioural problems and as such are usually unsuitable for re-homing as the sanctuary has a duty of care for adoptions. We currently make the decision and fund the cost of euthanasing sick, injured, banned breeds and particularly aggressive strays in our care, having regard to relevant legislation on animal welfare and stray dogs.

4.5 The current arrangement is proving financial unsustainable for the contractor as we gift all strays to the kennels and they are then liable to assess them for re-homing and gift the suitable ones to their animal sanctuary. As such the Council only normally euthanase dogs as described above. The contractor will be given greater discretion to euthanase dogs upon the eighth day at our expense.
5. **PROCUREMENT PROCESS**

5.1 Standing orders allowed for the Service Manager to invite expressions of interest from known local providers. In July, twelve providers were contacted. Two providers proceeded to bid, of which one, Canis, is the current provider.

5.2 Canis submitted the lowest overall bid for a three year contract.

6. **FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS**

6.1 The Council’s Financial Regulations delegate authority to a Head of Service to accept the lowest tender. The projected cost of this tender, assuming the current volume of strays does not change, is £20,244 and is within the Council’s budget. Based on the past three years activity this cost has a tolerance of about +/-15%. So whilst the day rates are fixed for three years the gross spend is entirely dependent on (a) the number and fate of the dogs and (b) how many days the dogs are boarding. These projections assume 1,193 boarding days per annum.

6.2 We do levy fees on claimants and this provides an income of over £6,000 per annum. Whilst we cannot pass on the cost of unclaimed dogs to them, as that falls to the general fund, our charges need to reflect our reasonable costs and as such these will be considered in the fees/charges report for 2013/14.

6.3 For budget purposes we refer to gross cost and separately account for the income. The income is calculated on projected volumes using the member approved fees. This is outside the scope of this report. However, we have endeavoured to keep the net cost to a minimum through a range of measures including the proposal outlined in 4.1 to reduce the maximum stay to 8 days, saving £1,450 based on current figures. However, the unsuitability of many unclaimed dogs for re-homing means we may bear an additional cost of £1,620 for euthanasia.

7. **EQUALITIES IMPACT**

7.1 This Policy has previously been impact accessed and measures put in place to ensure that people with protected characteristics are not adversely affected. These measures including exempting assistance dogs remain in place.
8. **RISK MANAGEMENT**

8.1 Internal procurement processes have been followed and a positive open dialogue has been held with both bidders. The lowest tender has been accepted and this also limits the number of dogs that will be put to sleep. It must, however, be acknowledged that, in the current economic climate, the number of dogs that go unclaimed and subsequently are destroyed will continue and we have taken steps to limit our financial liability for this.

8.2 The key risks arising from this are outlined in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Risk</th>
<th>Likelihood (H/M/L)</th>
<th>Impact (H/M/L)</th>
<th>Mitigating action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Planning permission is not obtained for the extended kennels and sanctuary</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>The contractor has until April 2013 to complete the works and as such the contract will be subject to this. Progress will be monitored.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The provider does not accept contract or cannot otherwise meet the conditions</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>On site discussions have taken place and both bidders contributed to the final specification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge of contract by unsuccessful bidder</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>Procedures have been followed and they have been informed that lowest cost bid accepted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adverse publicity regarding the euthanasia of healthy dogs</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>We have retained the ability to gift unclaimed dogs to a sanctuary. We can demonstrate that we avoid destroying healthy dogs where practical.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

9. **CONCLUSION**

9.1 The continuation of the stray dog boarding service with Canis Ltd provides the most economically advantageous contract for the Council to effectively deliver its statutory duty.
10. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Cabinet is recommended to approve:

10.1 That stray dogs are kept for not more than 8 days, except when legal obligations necessitate a longer stay.

10.2 That the contract duration is three years with an option for the Head of Environment to extend it by a further two years, subject to a review of prices with the contractor.

11. **REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

11.1 To ensure the Council has arrangements in place to meet its statutory duties in relation to the receipt and boarding of stray dogs.

11.2 To ensure the Council keeps the cost of the service to a minimum.

Further information on this report can be obtained from Russell Sinclair (Extension 5397).

**DARRAN WEST**  
HEAD OF ENVIRONMENT

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Officer recommendation supported/not supported/modified as below or Executive Member’s recommendation/comments if no officer recommendation.

Signed

Executive Member

Date

Consultee Executive Member/Assistant Member comments (if applicable)