

PROPOSAL TO ESTABLISH AN ANIMAL WELFARE TRUST

INTRODUCTION

This proposal arises from the Strategic Options exercise undertaken in January 1998. Animal Welfare Services adopted an holistic approach to animal welfare and control through a pilot programme with the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry whereby Waitakere officers were warranted under the Animals Protection Act 1960 as Inspectors. Council has expressed concern that Animal Welfare Services should be sustained or expanded without it being a further imposition on rating revenue.

STRATEGIC CONTEXT

The Dog Control Act 1996 required Council to develop and implement a Dog Policy which created and enforced the appropriate by laws as necessary. The resultant services include advice and information, dog registration and impoundment of dogs. Additional activities include prevention of cruelty to animals, as outlined in the Animal Protection Act 1960. Responding to requests for services and the educational role is a significant aspect of Animal Welfare Services' function.

As outlined in the Funding Policy, costs are largely funded by user charges obtained from dog registration fees.

OPTIONS

The Strategic Options process identified the benefits and limitations of all options that are open to Council with regard to Animal Welfare Services. The resulting four options are:

1. Exit/Contract Out
2. Minimal Service Delivery
3. Status Quo
4. Charitable Trust

1. Exit/Contract Out

Place contractable work on open market with loss of animal welfare component; though Animal Welfare Services is the only current operator warranted to provide. Necessarily adopt a more skeletal "catch and kill" approach.

Advantages

Nil

Disadvantages

- Loss of service regarding sustainable approach and reduced customer focus.
- Major negative change to service with emphasis on "catch and kill" as opposed to recycling and sustainability.
- Loss of animal welfare thrust.
- Negative community reaction towards less palatable service.
- Less owner control of operation.

Financial Outcome

Two per cent (\$24,000) short term cost reductions possible by cutting out items such as staff training and education activities, but likely to be offset by public relations damage control. Long term increased costs due to problems increasing through lack of preventive measures and a sustainable approach.

2. Apply Minimal Service Delivery with No Development

Remove animal welfare component from work and deliver a skeletal service adhering only to dog and stock control legislative requirements (adopt a more "catch and kill approach").

Advantages

- Minimal short term cost reduction.

Disadvantages

- All the same disadvantages as for Option 1.
- Longer term deterioration of animal control due to unsustainable approach.
- Is contrary to Council's strategic direction.

Financial Outcome

Two per cent (\$24,000) short term cost reductions possible through slicing items such as staff training and education activities but likely to be offset by PR damage control. Long term increased costs due to problems increasing through lack of preventive measures and a sustainable approach.

3. Status Quo

Build on current achievements with options available to develop any or all of further initiatives such as:

- cremator based business;
- charitable trust basis for business;
- growth of community partnerships;
- establish cattery and wildlife centre;
- develop independence level to LATE extent if desired;
- generally expand/diversify business ventures;
- explore forming a joint Dog Control Authority with another TA to increase mass and reduce costs;
- tender for other TA dog control contracts.

Advantages

- Further opportunities created through growth.
- Profits are returned to the owner and the citizens.
- Long term benefits.
- Sustainable outcomes.
- Customer satisfaction.
- Owner satisfaction.
- Eco-city approach.
- Retains and develops achievements to date.
- More control of operation by owner maintained and enhanced reputation for owner and business.

Disadvantages

- Possibility of further capital outlays depending on which growth options are pursued.

Financial Outcome

Long term sustainable financial growth. Capital outlays required depending on choice of ventures.

4. Charitable Trust as a Foundation for Business Growth

Develop on current achievements. Seed fund the establishment of the Trust.

Advantages

- Same advantages as for Option 3, which are significant per se, plus the following:
- Trust attracts community support.
- Trust attracts donations, legacies, and business partnerships.
- Trust is eligible for funding via ASB, Lotto, NZI and other fund raising community programs.
- Trust opens a cluster of revenue opportunities
- Owner can enter into business partnerships with Trust and create a financial return for the citizens.

Disadvantages

- Depending upon options entered some capital outlay could be required.
- Seed funding to set up Trust with an initially part time administrator would be required. Minimal amount required (\$10K to \$20K).

Financial Outcome

Long term sustainable financial growth with business opportunities extending internationally.

Increasing dog registration fees is not seen as a positive option. Establishing a charitable trust to enhance revenue opportunities and provide enhanced services to the community is seen as a preferable option.

Benefits

Waitakere City has established itself as a progressive authority, e.g. the Greenprint, and is a national and international leader of change:

- first New Zealand city to adopt Agenda 21;
- first to adopt ECO-city mission statement;
- first to synergise animal welfare and animal control;
- first (and only) city to have animal welfare warrants for its animal control officers.

Synergising animal welfare and animal control, while not new internationally, is new to New Zealand. The pilot programme that Animal Welfare Services has been operating for the past three years has established a proven track record endorsed by three positive quality assurance audits conducted by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry's Compliance Group.

A charitable trust enables greater opportunities for attracting funds and providing an holistic animal welfare service to the community than would a commercial entity. A charitable trust is favoured over an incorporated society, as control of an incorporated society is entirely in the hands of its members, whereas control of a trust is in the hands of the trustees, the majority of whom will be appointed by Council.

The proposal aligns with Council's strategic direction in that it is:

Sustainable - in terms of achieving a long-term approach for dealing with animal related issues. Animal Welfare and Control are inseparable in practice and Council (via Animal Welfare Services) has since 1989 promoted the message that the key to effective animal control is to take an active and daily interest in the welfare of the animal.

This is a sustainable approach that works and influences social change in the way that people keep animals. It is an individual accountability issue which marries into community well-being, promoting sustainable and favourable outcomes in terms of animals and people living together in increasing close proximity.

Dynamic - it will enable and facilitate positive change both locally and nationally. Part of dynamism is innovation and the proposal is certainly innovative. Once the option is established and formalised, the platform will have been made for the merging of welfare and control which is the key to the future of the animal related industry in Waitakere and the rest of New Zealand.

Just - the dated view of catching dogs and impounding to kill them is not in keeping with Council's Greenprint. The enlightened approach adopted by Council's Animal Welfare Services is community focussed and just. It seeks to re-educate owners and re-house suitable dogs to appropriate homes, as opposed to a "catch and kill" approach. Furthermore, it seeks to educate citizens about animal care generally.

CONCLUSION

Upon completion of the analysis, Option 4 was deemed to be the most appropriate direction for the following reasons:

- Provides vision for the future of the City, citizens and the entire industry itself.
- Takes an holistic approach to the social well being of its people. People need pets for their well-being and for recreation. Promotion of responsible pet ownership enhances that well-being.
- Provides for social well-being and leisure and has a long term perspective.
- Enhances the notion of living in strong, caring communities.
- Protects the environment through initiatives. A community that cares for its animals also cares for the environment. A greater educational initiative will enhance the symbiotic relationship of animals and the environment and the control of pests and unwanted animals through humane control.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the information be received.
2. That it be recommended to Council that the proposal to establish an Animal Welfare Trust be approved.

Report prepared by: Tom Didovich, Animal Welfare Services Manager.