

THURROCK COUNCIL COUNCIL ANIMAL WELFARE POLICY

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Introduction

The Council recognises the benefits of the application of good animal welfare practices in society. Animals play an important role in the lives of our residents both in a work and social context. The roles played by animals include providing companionship to pet owners, providing vital assistance to people to overcome sensory impairments in the case of guide dogs and hearing dogs, providing assistance with security and law enforcement in the case of sniffer dogs and those dogs used for security purposes and providing a number of leisure and sporting activities for example, zoo visits, horse riding and horse racing. Animals also form an integral part of our environment contributing to its diversity and its beneficial impacts on human physical and mental health.

Executive Summary

This policy aims to provide an overview of the Council's view on the local delivery of animal welfare. It seeks to distinguish the Council's legal responsibilities and the areas where the Council can use its influence to improve animal welfare from matters which whilst pertaining to animal welfare are best managed by others.

The policy does not cover all elements of animal welfare but focuses on those elements that the Council considers to be important and within its sphere of influence as a local authority. It does not cover wild animals in nature or those animals used for research.

The Council believes that where applicable people with control of/or responsibility for animals should follow nationally mandated standards or take equivalent steps to ensure the welfare of these animals. The Council itself undertakes to follow such guidelines in circumstances where it has direct dealings with animals, for example in the operation of its stray dog service.

Context

The Council is of the view that people who have control of animals or are responsible for them, either on a temporary basis or on a longer term basis, for example as the owners of an animal have a duty to ensure they are not subjected to cruel or inhumane treatment. They are also responsible for ensuring that their animals have their basic requirements with regard to food, water and accommodate suitable for their species provided for. The council expects that good welfare practices will be applied for the life time of animals under the control of a person or organisation.

This includes the start and end of an animal's life where welfare steps appropriate to the age of the animal and its state of health should be taken. This would include appropriate steps to ensure young animals are not separated from their mothers prematurely and the provision of appropriate veterinary treatment or humane euthanasia where required and in any event to prevent unnecessary suffering.

Companion Animals

This Council supports the Animal Rights/Welfare Organisations in their call for greater protection for dogs and cats and all other companion animals in the community and considers that such matters should be a duty of the Permanent Council for Animal Protection and in particular this Council is of the opinion that: -

There should be greater Central Government Support for the various voluntary organisations concerned with animal welfare.

That a national compulsory dog registration scheme be introduced.

That all dogs be required to have at all times a means of identification of its owner.

The Council will give support where possible to the police authorities in their enforcement of the dangerous dog legislation.

Puppy Farming

The Council strongly opposes the practice of puppy farming and seeks to encourage responsible dog breeding practices.

With regard to feral cats

The Council will support any investigation into the health and incidence of feral cat populations, which may exist within the Borough and will use its best endeavours to achieve:

the humane capture and re-homing of feral cats to any appropriate welfare agency; and

assistance being given to appropriate voluntary agencies by the owners of premises populated by feral cats for the spaying and neutering of feral cats and for the promotion of their welfare.

With regard to horses

The Council considers the practice within the Borough of the unlawful tethering of horses and other livestock on highway verges, play areas and other Council owned land to be unacceptable and DECLARES that such animals will be removed by the relevant council department and sold or rehomed appropriately. The proceeds of any sale will be retained by the Council to offset against the cost of removal.

Performing Animals

Whilst this Council does not object to performing animals it is of the opinion that training methods should not involve suffering or fear by the animals nor should the performance by the animal be degrading in any way. This Council will, therefore, make every effort to ensure that: -

Circuses that include the use of animals (excluding domestic animals) will not be allowed on Council owned land.

Circuses visiting the Borough are inspected to ascertain, so far as is possible, that animals are well kept and cared for and that training methods are humane. Any suspected mistreatment or cruelty toward animals following such inspections will be dealt with robustly including using the resources of the RSPCA and the Council's Consultant Veterinary Service.

That animals are not put in fear.

Animals as Prizes

The Council will prohibit the use of animals as prizes at circuses, fairs and for any other activities of a similar nature that take place on its land and will discourage this on other land within Thurrock where it has powers or influence

Fishing

The council encourages anglers to abide by the current version of the Freshwater Rod Fishing Rules published by the Government. They encourage anglers to fish in accordance with relevant welfare standards that exist or are introduced subsequent to the adoption of this policy.

Factory Farming

This Council, whilst recognising that farming practice has an impact on the cost of food, supports the adoption of the best possible welfare standards for farmed animals. The Council believes that consumers should be encouraged to purchase food produced in accordance with farm welfare accreditation schemes where these are in place.

Exportation and Transportation of Animals

This Council supports the adoption and mandating of safe and humane practices in the transport and exportation of live animals.

Experiments on living animals

The Council opposes experiments carried out on living animals where an alternative method is available or where the purpose of the experimentation is not essential for the development of technology to treat human disease or promote human health.

Wildlife

The Council supports the protections for wildlife mandated by the Wildlife and Countryside Legislation currently in force. The Council will collaborate with the RSPCA and other interested parties to uphold standards of wildlife protection in the conduct of its own activities and to positively influence the conduct of others where this has an impact on the welfare of wild animals.

The role of Council Departments

A number of the Council's teams have a role to play that can influence standards of animal welfare in Thurrock. These include:

Licensing, who issue licences and registrations for a number of animal related undertakings and thereby have influence on the standards applied by businesses and individuals who have control of animals. Examples of this include licences for pet shops, animal boarding establishments for cats and dogs, dog breeding, the keeping of dangerous wild animals, horse riding establishments, zoo licensing and the exhibition of animals. This last category includes circuses, use of animals in film and television productions and theatre work.

The various licensing regimes applicable to animal related activities provide an opportunity for the Council to exert influence over welfare standards, in some instances welfare standards are embodied in national model standards for example for species specific cage sizes in pet shops. In other cases the welfare of animals is promoted by the provision of specific advice on an animal welfare issue. In these instances the councils licensing officers will provide advice based on their experience or where necessary based on consultation with external experts either from interested organisations such as the dogs trust or RSPCA or Veterinary Surgeons with specialist knowledge of the species concerned.

Trading in Animals

This Council having statutory responsibility for the inspection of Pet Shops continues its policy of vigorous inspection so as to ensure that such animals as are kept in pet shops are maintained in proper and humane conditions and in particular the Council will have regard to such advice as may be given by the Council's Veterinary Consultant (and under any planning or other implications) before a licence is granted or refused.

FURTHER this Council deplores the use of animals as prizes of inducements and will not permit such activity on Council owned land and will encourage other land owners to do likewise.

Investigation of complaints of alleged breach of licence conditions

The Council's officers will promptly and thoroughly investigate and enforce any alleged breach of licence conditions as necessary seeking advice from its veterinary consultant.

NOTE: Whilst not prohibited by licence conditions, the Council discourages sales of exotic pets from pet shops.

The licensing team will, where advice fails to ensure compliance and welfare standards are not being upheld in the licensed keeping of animals, escalate action as per the Council's enforcement policy. Actions could include suspension or revocation of licences and/or legal action to secure compliance or prevent the activity.

Assets, who manage the Councils land and property, can influence the welfare of animals by the inclusion of appropriate conditions on hiring and lease agreements that they issue to permit the use of council land and premises by outside parties. These agreements are often bespoke and provide the opportunity for the Council to influence animal welfare by the exclusion of activities that are not conducive to animal welfare in the lease agreements lessees sign up to on taking over a council asset. For example grazing or the keeping of animals can be excluded from a lease if appropriate.

Trading Standards, operate the Councils stray dog service whereby a contractor accepts stray dogs reported within the Thurrock area and arranges for these to be kennelled and feed while attempts are made to identify an owner. Where this is not possible all reasonable steps are taken to rehome the dog with a suitable owner. Wherever possible the Council will avoid putting down healthy dogs.

Trading Standards are also delegated to work on the welfare of farmed animals. The service works with farmers to promote the responsible and humane treatment of farm animals on the farm and during transport.

Housing are responsible for the provision of a considerable proportion of rented residential accommodation within the borough. The department sets conditions on residential tenancies to promote the responsible keeping of pets and to ensure they are only kept in suitable accommodation and to prevent this activity disturbing other residents. The general stipulations regarding the keeping of animals in council accommodation is set out in section 4 of the Councils standard tenancy agreement.

Collaboration with Outside Agencies

The Council collaborates with other organisations that have an interest in animal welfare and health. These organisations include the Animal and Plant Health Agency and the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

Legal Provisions

The Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (England) Regulations 2018

Environmental Protection Act 1990 – Provision of a stray dog service

Housing Act 1996

Approach to Enforcement

Thurrock Councils approach to achieving compliance with legislation protecting animal welfare will follow the Council's Enforcement Policy. A graduated approach will be taken to achieving compliance ranging from the provision of advice through to the service of notices detailing measures that must be taken to achieve compliance up to prosecution of alleged offenders who consistently fail to meet their responsibilities under the relevant legislation.