



Subject:	Review of the Local Government operational arrangements for the Animal Welfare Service in regard to the implementation of the Welfare of Animals Act 2011
Date:	5 th June 2018
Reporting Officer:	Nigel Grimshaw, Strategic Director City & Neighbourhood Services Department
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Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Some time in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of Main Issues
1.1	The purpose of this report is to update Members of a need to further review the current operational arrangements of the Animal Welfare Service across the five Regional lead Councils with a view to future-proofing service delivery within anticipated future budgetary constraints.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	The Committee is asked to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Note the contents of the report, in particular the themes to be covered in the review and the advice from the Department of Agriculture, Environment & Rural Affairs (DAERA) around future budget uncertainty.
3.0	Main Report

The Welfare of Animals Act 2011

- 3.1 The arrangements for enforcement of the Welfare of Animals Act 2011 by Councils was approved by the NI district council Chief Executives, at a SOLACE meeting on 4th November 2011, where it was determined that the most appropriate means to deliver the new animal welfare duties placed upon local government would be by the adoption of a regional collaborative 'cluster' approach. The principle of collaboration across councils was enshrined in the arrangements for animal welfare with shared staff in the form of animal welfare officers being authorised by all councils to act on their behalf whilst recognising the individual responsibility of the council to give consideration to relevant issues should there be a need for prosecution. The service is fully funded by DAERA and, as agreed at implementation, is cost neutral to Councils.
- 3.2 Since the operative date of The Welfare of Animals Act on 2 April 2012, the Animal Welfare service in Councils has been reviewed by the Project Board in March 2013 and March 2015 with recommendations endorsed by SOLACE resulting in increases in staffing levels due to the increasing demands on the service.
- 3.3 Committee was informed of the outcome of the review that was undertaken by DAERA following the Motion that was debated in March 2014 at the Northern Ireland Assembly calling for a review of the implementation of the Welfare of Animals Act (NI) 2011, particularly in relation to sentencing guidelines and practices, to ensure that the maximum effectiveness was being brought to bear to combat animal welfare offences.
- 3.4 The Final Report of the Review of the Implementation of the Welfare of Animals Act 2011 included 68 recommendations with the purpose of improving the implementation of the Act to better protect the welfare of animals. An Action plan in relation to the final report was published in November 2016 and the actions are updated quarterly.
- 3.5 Since the implementation of the animal welfare legislation, the service has been delivered on a sub-regional basis with a staffing complement of nine Animal Welfare Officers employed to deliver the function across the region.
- 3.6 The delivery of the Service is overseen by a regional Project Board which provides governance arrangements and financial oversight. Belfast City Council has one Animal Welfare Officer and one dedicated administrative officer. The Animal Welfare service in the City Council area accounts for 17% of the cases in the region. Due to increasing demand for the service, we rely on Animal Welfare Officers from the adjoining area (Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council) to assist with workload in the City Council area.

3.7	<p>The Service has been fully funded by DAERA since the start of the service in 2012 and this year the Councils have been allocated a budget resource of £1.25 million to deliver the service across the region. DAERA have advised that they as a Department face ongoing budget uncertainty and there is a prospect of further constraints on public sector finances in future years.</p>
3.8	<p>In light of concerns around the future funding of this Service, it is necessary to review the current operational arrangements of the Animal Welfare Service across the five regional lead Councils.</p>
3.9	<p>The review is considered necessary following a period of sustained increases in demands on and expectations of the service, which has put the operating model including the budget under significant strain.</p>
3.10	<p>In addition to service delivery issues the review offers an opportunity to consider the effectiveness of the Project Board arrangement and the impact of Central Government austerity measures.</p>
3.11	<p>The Review will be overseen by the Project Board in conjunction with an independent facilitator to provide direction for the review, commission work in a number of work-streams, prepare an interim and final report, and provide advice to Project Board. The Review will consider the Animal Welfare service under the following themes.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The role of the Project Board 2. Delivery Structures/Model 3. Workload including on call/ prioritisation of calls 4. Enforcement Outcomes 5. Resilience 6. Administrative support
3.12	<p>The Animal Welfare service continues to be a high profile service, which attracts the interest of the public and media coverage. It is important that current service delivery is sufficiently funded to address the on-going demands for the service and to ensure that it can be delivered effectively.</p> <p><u>Financial & Resource Implications</u></p>

3.13	DAERA has now confirmed that a maximum of £1.25m resource funding will be made available to Councils for the 2018/19 financial year to fulfil the statutory enforcement obligations arising from the Welfare of Animals (Northern Ireland) Act 2011.
3.14	In allocating this year's budget, DAERA have also advised that they as a Department face ongoing budget uncertainty and there is a prospect of further constraints on public sector finances in future years.
3.15	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications</u></p> <p>None</p>
4.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
	None