

**WRS Board**  
**14<sup>th</sup> February 2018**

**Information Report – Reuniting dogs with Owners Out of Hours**

<b>Recommendation</b>	That the Board notes the report
<b>Background</b>	<p>Every quarter Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) reports on the number of compliments and complaints that are received to the Board. Since the formation of the current Board, there have always been a far higher number of compliments than complaints received, however, for all complaints the WRS Manager for that Service area reviews the complaint and provides a response to the complainant. Board Members will recall an Information Report presented at the February Board Meeting last year providing a review of WRS Service Complaints. That report included (Review 3) an investigation into 9 complaints received between April 2015 and October 2017 where the main cause for complaint was dissatisfaction of a dog owner that they were not able to collect their dog at the weekend or Bank Holidays.</p> <p>The report presented possible solutions with associated costs and barriers to be overcome to resolve those complaints. The Board agreed the cost of implementing a solution was not justifiable to prevent 9 complaints over two and half years.</p> <p>The section of the report relevant to this issue is presented as Appendix 1 for reference purposes.</p>
<b>Report</b>	<p>Since that report WRS Officers have been working with the main contracted kennelling provider to attempt to overcome the barriers preventing out of hours reunification of stray dogs with their owners.</p> <p>Following negotiation the kenneling contractor agreed to a trial of facilitating reunification of some dogs to owners out of hours within certain parameters (conditions) which have enabled some of the barriers reported previously to be overcome. The trial was successful for the three months it ran with no significant issues.</p> <p>The conditions enable dogs to be returned to their owner where the situation concerning that dog is straightforward: that is, the dog is microchipped and the details correctly match up to the person claiming the dog.</p> <p>The conditions that apply:</p>

- Collection is only possible out of hours up to 6pm (Monday to Friday) and between the hours of 9am – 11:30am and 3pm – 4pm (Saturdays, Sundays and Bank Holidays) excluding Christmas Day, Boxing Day and New Year's Day.
- Owner is able to and pay in cash;
- Details on the microchip are up to date and match those of the owner claiming the dog;

It is NOT possible for an owner to collect their dog out of hours if the following apply:

- The dog is not microchipped or the details held on a microchip are not up to date or the chip is unregistered;
- The microchip is registered to a foreign company that will not release the details;
- There is a dispute concerning costs or any fees applicable;
- Where the owner is not able to pay in cash;
- There is a specific concern regarding the identification of the owner;
- The dog owner or acquaintances have been abusive, threatening or represent a risk to Kennel staff;
- There is a health, welfare or legal issue with the dog;

Any Owner not able to collect their dog out of hours due to the reasons above will be directed to the WRS Duty Officers at 9am the next working day as previously.

The above process enables swift reunification where owners have been responsible with keeping details up to date with a microchipped dog but reduces risk to staff at the kennels, avoids scenarios where there are complexities in fee calculation or welfare investigations. Whilst complaints are still likely where the owner has not been able to claim their dog out of hours, there are defensible reasons for this.

The new process will be kept under review.

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**Contact Points**

# Appendix 1

## **Review 3: Inability for owners to collect their dog at the weekend**

With nine complaints concerning this specific subject it is clearly an issue of annoyance to dog owners. WRS provides an out-of-hours collection service (using a contractor) to collect stray dogs but none of the partner authorities have ever had a full dog warden service out of hours.

The service package available to clients, out-of-hours is different depending on which District the dog was found straying in, which can also lead to further annoyance. Below is a comparison of the service provided by the authorities which WRS provides the Dog Warden Service for:

<b>Authority</b>	<b>Can dogs be reunited with their owners over bank holiday weekends?</b>	<b>Comment</b>
Bromsgrove District Council	Yes	
Cheltenham Borough Council	No	
Gloucester City Council	No	
Malvern Hills District Council	Yes	If dog found as a stray before 4.30pm on any day it may be collected out of hours, otherwise dog goes to kennel where weekend collection not possible.
Redditch Borough Council	No	
Tewkesbury Borough Council	No	
Worcester City Council	No	
Wychavon District Council	No	
Wyre Forest District Council	Yes	

The issue is dictated by the kenneling contractors. Of the three contracted kennels, two open at weekends and provide payment facilities. The third kenneling contractor, who is also the one working with WRS for the Gloucestershire authorities and some other non-stray contracts, due to capacity and location, does not provide payment facilities and is not willing to undertake the 'administrative element' of matching up dogs with owners at the weekend.

Contractually we are not tied to which kennel receives which dogs (for Partner Authorities) although there are significant capacity issues at the one used for Malvern Hills dogs and there are logistical issues with the location of the kennels used for Wyre Forest & Bromsgrove Dogs. It is worth noting one complaint raised the distance to the kennels as an issue. As the Out of Hours stray dog collection contractor is the third kenneling contractor there would be additional costs in terms of transportation if dogs were being taken to the other kennels rather than their own.

The third kenneling contractor has been willing to consider the situation and from experience has generally been open to working with WRS to improve the service in many ways. It is partly due to their willingness to take dogs from multiple geographical areas and for various different contracts that makes the process of taking payment and facilitating the return of dogs to owners out of hours complex and not viable for the company. Dissatisfied dog owners are a significant concern for this contractor as they also have other private business dependent on their company's reputation so with the current arrangement of WRS facilitating the return, dog owners do not associate them with 'the Council'.

The following practical issues remain outstanding:

- Reputational risk to third kenneling contractor in dealing with dog owners;
- Complexity of different procedures for 9 Authorities
- Complexity of different charges for 9 Authorities
- Confusion between contact numbers for out of hours contractor and kenneling contractor (both services provided by the same contractor company but one number would need to be public and the other kept for contract and collection work);
- Significance of administrative work required to verify owner, chase up conflicting information and deal with issues.
- Staffing resource issue;
- Staff safety issue;
- No electronic payment facility

Currently there is no viable option to amend the current arrangements either by working with the third kenneling contractor or using alternative kennels. The only option left would be to consider providing an out of hours (primarily weekend and bank holiday) resource to undertake the administrative role in facilitating the reunification of an owner with their dog, calculate outstanding fees, take payment and advise of kennel location. There is no guarantee that the above solutions would resolve the complaints, as it doesn't resolve the inability to reclaim dogs in the evenings.

### **Review 3: Possible solutions with estimated costs**

Such a role would be at scale 4 and provided as a rota between existing Duty Officer staff, as an 'on-call' standby payment or as a new post. The estimated costs in providing each are given below:

Option	Service provision option	Estimated cost
A	Existing Duty Officers to provide cover as Standby payment with additional payment per call.	£21,427*
B	New part-time post at Scale 4 employed to cover weekends and bank holidays.	£12,811

\*based on average of 8.5 calls per weekend.

In exploring either of the above options, there would be some financial benefit with potential removal of dog warden out of hours call out payment (£500/annum) and

reduced resource required on Monday mornings in dealing with the backlog of dog related activity from weekend.

However, for a small team of 4FTE covering all of the first contacts for WRS across the full range of service areas, it would be very difficult to cover within existing resources. With Option A, there would be some loss of the current 4 FTE capacity to weekend work, potentially leaving the team short of resource at the peak times for other demand, on Mondays and Tuesdays in particular. Morale and staff retention could potentially become an issue for the team who are considered a linchpin to the operation of WRS' operating model to 'resolve at first point of contact' for the majority of our work. This represents a significant risk of disrupting the wider service.

### **Review 3: Conclusion**

Based on the last three years, the maximum level of success would be preventing 7 complaints (2 of the 9 complaints concerned inability to collect dog on Friday evening which would not be resolved by these options). Partner Authorities may consider the benefit from providing such a service does not outweigh the cost in delivery or potential service disruption.

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