

**REPORT FOR: TENANTS' AND
LEASEHOLDERS'
CONSULTATIVE FORUM**

Date of Meeting: 25 February 2010

**Subject: INFORMATION REPORT -
Dangerous Dogs within Social
Housing**

**Responsible Officer: Lynne Pennington Interim
Divisional Director Housing**

Exempt: No

Enclosures: None

Section 1 – Summary

This report sets out the action Resident Services want to take to address the heightened concern of dangerous dogs within its social housing stock in partnership with the Environment Protection Community Safety Team

FOR INFORMATION

Section 2 – Report

Over the last year there have been many reports in the media about the increased breeding and ownership of dangerous dogs and so called status dogs. Owners, relations and members of the public have sustained serious injuries, some fatal leading to dogs being ‘put down’. This has heightened the public’s awareness and concerns regarding dangerous dogs.

It is evident that some of these dangerous dogs are owned by council tenants or their visitors and are a contributing factor to Anti Social Behaviour (ASB) within and around council stock. Harrow Housing Department plans to:

- introduce micro-chipping of dogs within council stock
- amend and enforce its tenancy agreements/leases and handbooks
- publicise and educate owners about the responsibility of dog owners
- increase its partnership working with internal and external agencies to address this problem

What is a dangerous dog?

Under Section 1 of the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 there are four types of dangerous dogs:

- The Pit Bull Terrier
- The Japanese Tosa
- The Dogo Argentino
- The Fila Brasileiro

The Dangerous Dogs (Amendment) Act 1997 classifies dangerous dogs by “type” and not by breed. The assessment of the physical characteristics is made by the court.

Although a large part of a tenancy agreement sets conditions for the control, behaviour and maintenance within a dwelling, Section 10(2) of the 1991 Act assists with dogs out of control in a public place. Section 10(2) of the 1991 Act defines a public place as meaning any street, road or other place to which the public have, or are permitted to have access. This is a wide definition of a public place and one which specifically **includes the common parts of a building containing two or more dwellings. It is intended to cover, for instance, those parts of a block of flats where, although there may be a secure front entry door so that the interior of the flat is not a place to which the public has unrestricted access, nevertheless the common parts are, in all other respects, a public place.**

How many dogs are owned within Harrow Council Stock?

Although section 8 of our tenancy agreement specifies the condition for pet ownership, it is evident that dogs have been acquired within our stock without our knowledge/permission. Housing Officers aim to manage this problem amicably with tenants when identified. The minority of cases do involve enforcement action, particularly in the summer season which is categorised around noise nuisance. We do not know the exact number of dogs living within our stock, however nationally, it is estimated that 1 in 4 households

have a dog. Within our housing stock that would equate to 1200 -1300 dogs. This figure does not resonate with staff that have a good knowledge of the borough and our stock. 10-20% (500-1000) of dwellings within our stock is more the reality of dog ownership.

Micro-chipping of dogs

Housing Management in partnership with the Environment Protection Community Safety Services is planning to micro-chip all dogs within council housing stock. Environmental Protection is currently in discussion with a charity that has offered 400 free chips. In excess of the first 400 a fee of £2.95 plus VAT will be charged for the chips (including registration). It is envisaged leaseholders will have to pay £2.95 plus VAT. Any costs from this initiative will be an additional cost to the Housing Revenue Account. This process will take some time to be implemented. Existing staff will be trained with the technical skills to micro-chip dogs or new qualified staff will have to be recruited.

Micro-chipping is a quick and painless means of permanently identifying a dog. It can be read by running a scanner over the dog to obtain a unique reference number which will identify the dog and its owner through the National Database for Pet Identification. Quick identification of dogs and owners can assist with addressing lost, abandoned and ASB perpetrating dogs.

Amendment of tenancy agreement/Leases

Many local authority housing departments have benchmarked with Wandsworth Borough Council who have been successful in micro-chipping dogs within its stock and changing its tenancy conditions to read '.....cannot keep a dog at the property without first obtaining written permission, which will not be unreasonably withheld, delayed or withdrawn. If permission is given, it will be on the condition that the dog is micro-chipped and relevant owner details recorded and kept up to date.'

As Harrow Housing department plan to introduce micro-chipping as a condition of dog ownership within its stock, it would have to change its tenancy conditions to reflect this to allow meaningful enforcement. Statutory consultation of its 5063 council tenants and approx 1200 leaseholders will have to take place. Consultation with legal services is taking place to establish the quickest way of doing this.

Publicity

The Homing In is a quarterly magazine distributed to council owned properties. In the next edition an advertisement of this initiative will be placed. Dog owners will be asked to contact their Housing Officer to give an early indication of the number of dogs within our stock who will need micro-chipping and registration. This advert will also remind dog owners about obtaining permission to have dogs within our stock and what the sanctions are if dogs are found to be not permitted within our stock. A request will be sent to the Harrow Observer to assist with publicity.

Partnership Working

Housing will work mainly with Environmental Services, the police, Public Realm, Registered Social Landlords and any other agencies to combat this problem.

Section 3 – Further Information

Current situation

There is only one case involving dog nuisance within our live caseload. Legal action has commenced against the owner. The Safer Neighbourhood Team are in the process of taking photographs of the perpetrating dog to establish possible identification to Section 1 of the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 in order to have the dog seized. Environmental Protection in Community Safety Services also deal with complaints of nuisance from dogs, covering barking, fouling, aggressive and unsociable dog behaviour or behaviours by residents, including Council tenants.

Section 4 – Financial Implications

There will be some costs for:

- Publicity in our quarterly Homing In magazine. Costs for this publication is already built into financial costs;
- Amendment to the tenancy, leases and handbooks. The financial impact will be approximately £150;
- Subsequent charges for the micro chips provided by the Environmental Protection Team is estimated at £1030. (350 x £ 2.95) in the financial year 10/11.

We do not envisage any recharge from the General Fund to the Housing Revenue Account. There will not be a capital expenditure.

Section 5 – Corporate Priorities

Progressing this matter will help the Council meet its vision, corporate priorities, and/or flagship actions by delivering:

- cleaner and safer streets
- building stronger communities

Name: Milan Joshi



on behalf of the
Chief Financial Officer

Date: 4 February 2010

Section 6 - Contact Details

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