

## Appendix 8

<b>Project/Item</b>	Alternative Arrangements for the Care of Animals
<b>Project Sponsor</b>	Communities Manager
<b>Project Manager / Author</b>	Area Manager / Assistant Operations Manager
<b>Date</b>	26 <sup>th</sup> January 2011
<b>Brief Description</b>	<p>As part of the Medium Term Financial Strategy, both the Operations and Communities Team were tasked to look into efficiency savings in relation to the costs of the animals in Stubblelee and Whitaker Parks.</p> <p>The current costs of maintaining the animals are as follows:</p> <p>Cost: Total: £18,543.84 per annum of which</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff cost during working week is £6448*</li> <li>• Food and bedding is £ 2078.84</li> <li>• New stock and vets fees is £100</li> <li>• Maintenance of enclosures is £874</li> <li>• Staff cost at weekends is £9043</li> </ul> <p>*part of normal annual salary, therefore this cannot be considered as a direct financial saving. However the staff would use this time and therefore equivalent cost to carry out other maintenance duties within the parks.</p> <p>There are currently 96 animals and birds at Stubblelee and Whitaker parks (rabbits, hens, cockatiels, budgies, finches, canaries, chipmunks, chickens, parakeets). The animals are caged in open enclosures where the public can visit and see them.</p> <p>The enclosures are dated and in constant need of repair and maintenance. Members of the public are neither encouraged or discouraged from feeding the animals and there is no provision for hand washing. The animals feed attracts vermin and baby animals are occasionally attacked by wild species. Significant investment would be required to bring the facilities to a more publicly acceptable standard with improved hygiene and better security / safety for the animals. The existing animal welfare is considered acceptable by the RSPCA, but only meets minimal</p>

standards.

The options are summarised below:

Option 1 – no change – RBC to continue to maintain the animals in the two separate parks.

- Annual costs still incurred at a time when budgets are being reduced.. (£193.00 per animal)
- Current facilities would need improving – new sheds, better fencing and improved hygiene for public. There is some public perception that the facilities in which the animals are kept are not good - bare concrete floors, open to the elements etc. The RSPCA have audited both sites this year and have confirmed they meet minimum standards, but additional resources to improve the facilities will be needed in the near future.
- Staff report that that visitors to the parks get enjoyment from looking at the animals. Some do feed them through the mesh fences at Whitaker Park but there is a potential issue here over biting or infection.
- We receive a few phone calls every year from people reporting baby rabbits at the parks having been killed and pecked at by wild birds which is disturbing for the public - children especially (and the animals). The external areas of the animal enclosures do not have a roof.

Option 2 – amalgamate facilities at one site

- Housing all the animals and birds at Whitaker Park would halve the overtime cost for upkeep whilst maintaining the facility for members of the public.
- Facilities here would still need upgrading and the same annual cost for food and bedding would be incurred.
- The animal enclosure at Stubblelee Park could be redeveloped as an area to observe native wildlife in the park – possibly a bird hide / screen.

Option 3 – use of volunteers

- Volunteers could be sought to help maintain the animals – particularly to feed and clean them out at weekends avoiding staff overtime costs
- Facilities at the parks would still need upgrading and the same annual cost for food and bedding would be incurred.
- It would be impossible to guarantee that volunteers will show up to feed and clean out the animals. Illness, bad weather, personal circumstances etc. could mean that volunteers forget or are unable to attend the animals with a

	<p>detrimental effect on animal welfare.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are a number of health and safety issues involved – animals may bite (they are not truly domesticated pets), and could cause infections, allergic reactions etc. Additional safety measures would need to be provided – gloves, antibacterial gel, disclaimers. It may be necessary to carry out health checks or ask for medical information before volunteers start to ensure claims cannot be made for pre existing chest problems, allergies etc.</li> <li>• Rats are a perennial problem at the animal enclosures, attracted by the food provided. Rats can bite and spread disease and asking volunteers to take pest control measures increases risk and the responsibility placed on them.</li> <li>• There are security issues e.g. if someone forgets to lock the gate. There are general issues around key holding responsibilities for volunteers and non RBC staff.</li> <li>• There are animal welfare issues also. Volunteers may not be experienced enough to know how to look after the animals – e.g. they may put too much food down resulting in an increase in vermin and food bills. Animals could show signs of illness or injury – again placing a lot of responsibility on the volunteers.</li> </ul> <p><u>Option 4 – re home all the animals</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The RSPCA have already stated they can re-home rabbits. The birds could be re-homed also.</li> <li>• There is the possibility of offering animals as pets – although unlike animal rescue organisations we cannot offer them with a health check or know the age of the animal.</li> <li>• Some people may be unhappy to see the animals go – but other authorities nearby have closed much more elaborate facilities, e.g. Animal World, Moss Bank Park, Bolton.</li> <li>• To counter balance the loss of the facility for the public, it could provide an opportunity to focus on natural wildlife in the parks – with information boards and some facilities provided.</li> <li>• The perennial problem of rats in animal enclosures would be resolved.</li> <li>• This option provides cost savings.</li> </ul>
<b>Recommendation</b>	<p>After consideration of the options, the recommendation is that the animals be appropriately re-homed and taken out of the Council's responsibility. This option provides saving and removes risks to the animals and members of the public.</p> <p>If a decision was made by Cabinet on 26<sup>th</sup> January 2011 to</p>

	support the recommendation above the target would be to re-home most if not all of the animals by end of March 2011.
<b>Identify Risk</b>	Risks are identified within the report.