



CITY AND COUNTY OF SWANSEA
DINAS A SIR ABERTAWE

**To/
Councillor Mark Child
Cabinet Member - Wellbeing and
Healthy City**

**Councillor Christine Richards
Cabinet Member - Services for
Children and Young People (Deputy
Leader)**

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WG/2015-16/TH

20 April 2016

BY EMAIL

Summary: This is a letter from the Tethered Horses Scrutiny Working Group to the Cabinet Member for Wellbeing and Healthy City and the Cabinet Member for Services for Children and Young People (Deputy Leader). It sets out the conclusions and recommendations from this working group - set up following a petition calling for a ban on the tethering of horses on Council land to be enforced.

Tethered Horses Scrutiny Working Group

Dear Councillor Child and Councillor Richards,

Horses Tethered on Council Land

I am writing to you with the conclusions and recommendations from the scrutiny working group looking at the issue of horses tethered on council land. As you know, we have been asked to consider the petition from Friends of Swansea Horses calling for a ban on this practice to be enforced by the Council. We have also considered the overall approach to this issue.

I would like to start by expressing our gratitude to those who took the time to provide evidence and to attend the two public meetings. The organisations that we heard from were:

- Friends of Swansea Horses (FOSH)
- Pettifor Trust
- Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA)
- Community Horse and Pony Scheme (CHAPS)

- South Wales Police
- Hillside Animal Sanctuary
- Hartlepool Borough Council

I want to express our thanks also to the members of the public who contributed and who shared their concerns via email. I want to reassure those who wrote in that we took time to carefully consider what they told us.

We are also grateful to you Councillor Child and to Dave Picken from Trading Standards for contributing.

We have produced an evidence pack from our work and this can be found on the scrutiny section of the Council's website. We hope that this will be useful, both to show the detailed evidence that our conclusions are based on, but also as a resource for any work going forward.

The remainder of this letter summarises our conclusions. Our recommendations can be found at the end.

1. Horse welfare is the common concern

Our starting point, and the starting point for everyone that we spoke to, is that the suffering of many horses kept on tethers on Council land is not acceptable. We heard enough examples of neglect and cruelty to convince us that the current situation cannot be allowed to continue and that something needs to be done.

2. This is a complex and challenging issue

Throughout the process of collecting evidence we were aware that this is a difficult issue and that easy answers will not be found.

The Councils current approach is to ensure that statutory responsibilities are met in respect of animal welfare and officers will deal with cases as they become aware of them. Actions include seeking to ensure that owners are acting responsibly, assessing the condition of horses and impounding horses where necessary. Signs are also put up at 'hotspot' locations to make it clear that the practice is not permitted.

Officers seek to be proactive where they can and we want to thank them for the work that they are doing. We note that this is not a statutory duty for the Council in the same way as other animal issues e.g. dogs. Nevertheless, the approach is addressing symptoms rather than causes and there is little sign that the problems associated with tethering are going to reduce. As the Cabinet Member confirmed to us, this is a challenging issue - one that the Council is only able 'to keep a lid on'.

3. There are strong arguments in favour of implementing and enforcing a ban

The petition, along with the emails we received and the evidence from FOSH and from the Pettifor Trust, shows that there is strong public support for implementing a ban on the tethering of horses on public land.

A comprehensive case was put to us by FOSH in which they detailed not just the serious welfare issues that can accompany this practice, but other problems such as loss of public amenity, the potential for community conflict and the poor image that it creates for Swansea.

As a working group we do not believe that Council land is suitable for the tethering of horses, however well the animals are cared for, nor do we believe that people should be allowed to use Council land in this way.

We also heard from FOSH that the Council, by allowing this practice, was permitting a problem cycle to continue. A phased ban, on the other hand, undertaken as part of a proactive partnership approach, could not only address the immediate animal welfare problems but also break a costly cycle. Currently the Council have to spend significant amounts of money dealing with cases of neglect and cruelty by impounding the affected horses.

The evidence we heard about how other Councils such as Hartlepool Borough Council have tackled this issue gives us some confidence that an enforced ban, if managed correctly, can be effective.

4. There are also strong arguments against implementing and enforcing a ban

The first argument against implementing a ban is that it is neither practical nor affordable. We heard from the Trading Standards Officer that while there are simply too many horses to implement a zero tolerance approach across the City and County of Swansea, we should be concerned about the cost implications of any new activity in this area. Given the serious financial challenges facing the Council we cannot take these financial concerns lightly for any additional money spent on this issue means taking resources away from other services. We are also concerned that the fate of impounded horses should a ban be enforced is unclear and that many would need to be euthanised.

A second argument is that a ban would not be effective. We heard evidence from CHAPS that a ban might be counterproductive in terms of horse welfare that horses could be kept in unsuitable stables such as garden sheds and that mistreated horses would no longer be visible to be helped. CHAPS also argued that, given the very low cost of buying horses (sometimes as little as £10), owners would have no difficulty in replacing any horses impounded. Enforcement would be made easier if negligent owners could be prosecuted

for mistreating horses however, as we heard from the RSPCA, proving ownership is extremely difficult. While we were not fully convinced by the evidence presented we nevertheless recognise that these are risks that must be taken seriously.

A third argument, also put to us by CHAPS is that, by enforcing a ban, the Council would be damaging a well-established culture in Swansea and the opportunity for many people living in deprived communities to pursue a positive hobby that might keep them away from crime or drugs. This an alternative approach that focusses on education rather than enforcement. As a working group we accept that owning horses has many positive benefits and, if done properly, can be a positive aspect of community life.

5. There is plenty of common ground between the organisations we heard from

All of the organisations we heard from expressed a strong desire to work in partnership to solve this issue. While there are differences of opinion we hope that these can be respected as part of a constructive partnership process. It seems to us that all that is missing is someone to facilitate a process that will bring together the different resources that are currently being used and the different knowledge and intelligence that people have. We believe that there is a great deal to be gained from bringing everyone together.

In their report to us CHAPS responded to each of the seven points proposed by FOSH as the basis for action. From this it we can see that there is also broad agreement about the need for:

- Effective communication and engagement with the public
- Liaison with rescue and rehoming organisations
- Education and support for responsible local horse owners
- The use of Council land to provide regulated grazing

We believe these points should be part of a multi-agency approach going forward.

6. The way forward is a piloted implementation of the ban that combines enforcement and education

The main disagreement in the evidence that we heard was between those who advocated an enforcement led approach and those proposing that community education should be front and centre.

We believe as a working group that solving this problem will require finding the best balance between both. While we would like to see responsible horse owning encouraged and supported we are also of the view that a small

minority will continue to act irresponsibly regardless of any education measures put in place. An element of enforcement will therefore be required.

In any case it is clear to us that the current situation cannot be allowed to continue.

Given the complexities, risks and costs involved, however, we propose that the Council facilitates a pilot scheme in one area of Swansea. This pilot scheme should be for a ban to be implemented following a delay of six months after announcement. Six months should provide time to work with responsible owners, ensure registration arrangements are in place and find suitable alternative grazing. We would like to see this alternative grazing limited to a manageable number of horses and to those owners who live in the pilot area.

Following the six month delay, we expect that agencies will work together to enforce the ban according to an agreed protocol following the Hartlepool model. We would also like to see additional steps taken to involve the public including a single point of contact that can be used.

We suggest that area for the pilot should be decided by the partnership group who will no doubt want to consider somewhere that amenities are already in place or can be easily established.

We understand that this will not happen quickly enough for everyone however, it is important that a new approach is given a chance to operate.

We also believe that this issue presents a clear opportunity for an 'invest to save' approach and that the Cabinet Member seeks additional resources for the pilot as required on this basis.

Once the pilot has ended it should be reviewed by the Cabinet Member with a presumption that the approach, given any appropriate changes, should be rolled out across the city on a phased basis.

Recommendations

In consideration of the petition from Friends of Swansea Horses, our recommendation to the Cabinet Members is that they:

- 1. Facilitate a partnership pilot scheme in one area for a ban delayed 6 months from its announcement.**
- 2. Invite all of the organisations who gave evidence to this working group to participate in the pilot**
- 3. Ensure that the following are addressed as part of the pilot:**
 - a) Effective communication and engagement with the public**

- b) A proactive approach to identifying and registering horses
 - c) Liaison with rescue and rehoming organisations
 - d) The use of Council land to provide regulated grazing this to include limited use of public land on a zero tolerance approach.
 - e) A partnership protocol for responding to incidents of horse tethering and ensuring effective enforcement following the Hartlepool model
 - f) Education and support for those who wish to own horses responsibly
 - g) A single point of contact for the public
4. Seek additional funding for the pilot on an 'invest to save' basis
 5. Roll out the partnership approach on a phased basis across Swansea taking into account any lessons learnt from the pilot

Your Response

In your reply we would be happy to hear your views on any of the issues we have raised and whether you agree or disagree with the recommendations that we have made.

In line with the Council Constitution we expect to receive your response by **11 May** at which point it will be published on the scrutiny pages of the Council website.

As a working group we may reconvene to check progress with you. In addition the issue may well be raised as part of the Scrutiny Programme Committee's regular Q&As with Cabinet Members.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,



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