

**Animal Licensing Forum
Council Chamber
Wednesday, 29th September 2010**

Present: Giovanna Silverio – Licensing & Enforcement Manager NHDC
Ken Rowe – Animal Welfare Officer NHDC
Steve Cobb – Senior Licensing Officer NHDC
Chris Woodard – Animal Services Manager, Stevenage Borough Council
Jeanette Deards – Clover Top Kennels
Georgina Clements – Waterdell Cattery
Vivienne Huffer – Cosy Cats Cattery
Peter Eymor – Country Boarding Kennels

Apologies: Mr Cross – New Wrights Farm
Roger and Margaret Fletcher – Romalia
Mr and Mrs Spreckley – Grey Shingles
The Roebucks Vets
Barry Huffer – Cosy Cats

Action

GS opened the meeting by welcoming those present. Housekeeping rules were outlined.

GS checked that everyone had received a copy of the minutes from the meeting which took place on 8th April 2010.

1. Minutes of the previous meeting of the 8th April 2010 were considered for any omissions.

GC – yes, I've got a correction for the fourth line up from the bottom, it says GS, which is me, the issue is over supervisor, I'm not, I've got no idea what that was.

Gio – So the issue over supervisors presumably that just needs to be expanded to say, "in the absence of the licensee what could the arrangements be or what are acceptable arrangements".

GC – Yes that's fine. There is another one where it says GC offered to go through and comment and present, that was Barry Huffer.

2. Matters arising from the minutes of the 8th April 2010-11-09

The question was asked where the minutes could be found on the website?

SC – I think you'll find unfortunately that one of this is yet on the website, it hasn't been put on there because there were several things that came up that needed to be looked at and we have not had the staff to put it on there yet, that's why we send out a letter rather than doing it in any other way or even point you towards the website. It will certainly be on for the new year.

It was agreed that if the website was not up and running then for a copy to be sent before we attend the next meeting. Otherwise for the

minutes to be on the web one week before the next meeting.

KR - Yes I think that's giving us a reasonable timescale to put it up and get the MSU to transcribe everything.

GS – confirmed this to be in place by the end of the calendar year, so that will be December.

KR - I know home-boarding was a subject that was brought up by several people. We have made some progress, obviously we have or I have visited those that are interested in home-boarding and what's happened is one person has actually applied and is just waiting for her licence to be signed. I've done the inspection, I've got four more that are going to take up home-boarding licence in January for the new year. The licence fee was set at £100 and we will obviously adjust the numbers of dogs that they can keep according to the premises that they are in. So we are moving forward with that albeit slowly but we will get there eventually.

Minutes agreed with some minor alterations as identified.

3. Future of the Forum.

SC - I'll do a quick overview. What we need to do as we've done with our other trade forums is look to formalise it as we said last time when we met, it was very much an informal arrangement. I asked you all to go away and think about how do we want the Forum to work, how often do we want to meet, what are we going to do about membership. Are you people happy to become Forum members and effectively represent like areas of the trade. Do you think that we need to encourage other members to be on the Forum and if so who, because we what we actually need to do to move this all forward is to formalise a terms of reference – copy of which was produced at the last meeting that gave you an indication of what we need to consider and it is frequency of meetings, Forum membership, so it's an open floor really, how it's going to be your Forum, how do you want it to move forward.

GC - I think a lot of it is similar to how we were working before. I have spoken to Gill Spreckley, we are kind of putting together some notes and they are happy for us to put them together, let them see them and if they have got any comments they'll give them and then we'll present it to you, so I think they are just happy for us to attend.

GC - The plan is that the terms have been redrafted, we will look at them and make any amendment that we think necessary or the other people who are involved. They will then be sent to all of the cattery and kennel owners in the district saying this is what we are proposing to put forward. If you've got any comments then contact us and as you suggested last time if they don't comment then you assume they are happy with it and we put that forward for the Council to look at and do whatever.

GC/GS

SC – that sounds good so hopefully next meeting you'll be able to tell us what the sort of trade as a whole, those that took the trouble to engage with you are happy with in terms of the Terms of Reference and Forum membership and then we can look to formalise it then and

move this all forward.

GC – Barry's has put something together me, and Peter are going to look through it but it has been a bit busy in trade at the moment.

GC

It was agreed that at the next meeting we can put on the Agenda formalising of our or your terms of reference and moving forward. How about frequency of meetings, have you had any thoughts about that.

GS - Asked how frequently the meetings ought to be e.g. every four weeks or every quarter.

VH - I would think every three or four months is fine, I mean if we are going to have a January one it might be an idea to move it back a week because maybe the 6th January is a bit too near to busy Christmas new year period, so a week later would be better. A discussion took place amongst the trade regarding their availability.

It was agreed to book the next meeting for the 12 January 2011 @ 1.00p.m.

SC - and what we will do to tie in with that, as obviously as Ken said, the website will be up and running from the end of this year. Ken will take responsibility for the website. Once the terms of reference are agreed they will be available on the website so everybody can have access to them, so will the minutes, so will the agendas for the forthcoming meetings. We'll set the meetings for the whole year so everybody is aware and any articles that come up on that might be of interest to the trade. In the interim, we can put on the website as well so it can be quite a useful tool for that and there will be a link on there if you have got any particular questions. There will be a link in there that you can e-mail your questions into, either for discussion at the Forum or to get individual responses as well.

KR

PE - This whole thing about representing the other businesses. The cattery side of it seems to have been the thing that's driven it from our point of view. It doesn't seem to be very much interest from the boarding kennel side apart from us two. I suspect you know whether you have had any responses from the others do you?

KR - We do know and we have not.

PE - No I don't want to waste my time chasing other people, so in a way we are probably representing just ourselves aren't we and I think that we should make that clear, that I'm not going to go chivvying round The Firs or Caribbean Kennels or anywhere else for that matter because I don't have the time and they have got no interest, so could I make that clear, yes.

KR - Bearing in mind your comments Peter I will chase the others to make sure they are fully aware of what is going on and make sure that they are aware of who they can contact if they do have something to say apart from the Council. So I mean if you get a strange phone call from Mr. and Mrs. Ely or Mr. Barry Cross then you will know where it's come from because as I go round and do the licences this year then I will be chasing everybody up and reminding them about the Forum so

we keep it foremost in our mind.

4. Trade Issues

No matters arising from the Minutes of the 8th April 2010

PE - well I have got something I wanted to bring up if this is the right place to bring it up. It's a bit, it's the old chestnut about this impervious wood. I have got the Kennel Management and this one's dated July and August 2010 and this is a new cattery. It's the story about the diary of a new cattery owner and I actually picked up on it and I rang the people that put this kennel in and got some quotes and basically they are doing probably 95% of new cattery constructions all out of wood and I just feel that this policy has really sort of made it difficult, not for us certainly, for me. If I wanted to upgrade my cattery I can't afford to upgrade to upvc which is ridiculous but I don't feel as though I can go forward with a wooden cattery because there is no clear instructions as to what is impervious. I can't see how wood can be impervious because cats do scratch, so it seems a bit of a sort of an old nugget I know but I mean we have been running this business for sixteen years and we've got, as you see, our catteries all wood. We've never had a problem, so I don't know what we are trying to achieve with upvc and I feel that it has just made it almost impossible for us to actually go forward and actually to develop a new cattery.

GC - I actually spoke to my husband about this and he says well, if you varnish wood its impervious. My indoor pens are varnished with yacht varnish which lasts for ten years in water, so I don't see that you can say wood is not ok. The cats do scratch wood but they scratch upvc as well, as you can see in my house and do damage, you know, so I think wood is quite adequate.

KR - I understand where you are coming from, I mean obviously upvc is a material that has been recommended, not just by us but by other people as well and mostly purely for hygiene and easy maintenance. You put upvc up, you shouldn't have to touch it in its lifetime to be quite honest with you. I mean you could clean it and wash it ok. Obviously I understand where you are coming from regards costs and I understand where you are coming from about cats scratching wood. I think that that is one of the things that when you go through the policy that you need to look at and if that is something that you don't agree with that's in the policy then you need to make a note of that and put that forward for an amendment or for it to be changed. Or in the meantime if you want to upgrade to a new wooden cattery, then as the policy stands, you could apply for a deviation from the policy and that's the way forward at the moment. I mean obviously what we need to do is make sure that we are helping you, we are not here to hinder your businesses, we are here to help you. If we have to remove upvc or leave that as an option, then it's something that we need to consider amongst ourselves away from the Forum, but we do need your comments so I think it would be good if when you go through the Policy, if that's something that you want to bring up then you bring that to our attention at that stage. I don't know how soon you were trying to improve your cattery or are you going to wait until next year and see what the result of this.

GC - That's certainly something that we can consider. I know people want to put up wooden kennels as well, you know, but I mean again we have a problem with wooden kennels, right, not only with the security side of it but obviously dogs are slightly different from cats. I mean you get a male dog could stand and pee up the wood and that will rot in weeks not years. I mean obviously cats are a cleaner creature and we do understand that so I think that's just something that we need to discuss ourselves and perhaps we will need to seek another opinion from somebody else outside of all of this so we have got our head round it all and then we can come back to you if you are happy with that. Thank you.

GS - a suggestion that it could also be a work plan issue that you could look at and produce us with the evidence which would then clearly support why the change, if there needed to be a change in the policy, and there is sufficient evidence for that.

A discussion then took place regarding changes to any structure which is built or due to be built and for the trade ought to consider seeking advice and consulting with relevant officers of the Council that being Planning Department and Building Control Department. It was agreed that KR would also liaise with the Planning Department.

KR

KR - The one thing I was going to say was that obviously different, I have spoken to different Planning Officers and normally if it's like in Peter's case he wants to replace his wooden cattery with a newer version of a wooden cattery, so long as he's not extending his concrete base then I don't think that there would be a great deal of problem with that being done because it's wood for wood like for like. There is one thing I would like to mention about this impervious material. There is a firm called Duchy Kennels which I have been talking to who build wooden kennels and they actually line them and seal them with a very lightweight upvc or plastic. Now if they can do that for kennels and that has proven to be useful, then I am sure that is something that could have been done for catteries and they will build to your specifications. They do have a website and that is just duchy kennels, worth having a look at.

5. Dates of the Next Meeting and e-mail Communication.

The date of the next meeting will be scheduled for the 12th January and hopefully with the setting up of the internet obviously that will be a means of communicating, but if you have any issues that you do wish to raise, whilst I appreciate Ken is your main point of contact, it's always worth putting your requests or any queries or comments to :

licensing@north-herts.gov.uk

this then allows for other officers to pick up any queries if Ken is away from the office.

KR - advised, that he would be amending the application form for licences this year asking for more contact details. At the present we normally only have telephone number, there will be a section on it asking for e-mail addresses which will make it easier for us as well.

SC - the only other thing is obviously in terms of work plan. We have got the issue about further guidance on impervious material and if you provide us with sufficient evidence then obviously we can do that. Are there any other issues that you think would be useful to put on the work plan for you to look at and give us some feedback about other areas of the policy that you are not sure of or have issues in meeting.

Barry Huffer has produced a list which can be forwarded. and has gone through the Policy with comments

It was reiterated that a work plan was needed to show that there's a purpose to the Forum and that over a period of time the policy would be looked at to ensure clarity and interpretation and where matters will be considered for change but supported by evidence..

KR - requested a copy of Barry's document so that I can have a look at it and I can pull up some evidence,

CW - Have you heard anything from the Petscare Trust in relation to their shops?

KR - No

CW - I find it quite surprising because they were, well, this business with the scientific names of animals etc. that they were going to come forward and it looks as though it may have been Chris Newman that would be put forward for Pets at Home. Pets at Home do now stock reptiles and they have had no problems I understand it is in line with the conditions that we set, yes that's right I mean we've licensed them in Stevenage to keep four species of reptiles, we have not at this point insisted on scientific names but the species are well known as captive animals and are bred in this country.

KR - I actually got the Pets at Home store here in Letchworth to copy all the details and the facilities that they had in Stevenage, because I went and had a look at the Stevenage one, so really I just copied it and it worked very well and they do only have two here, I think there's the Bearded Dragon and the Gecko.

Reiterated the service re Stray Dogs that's provided and how it's set up in conjunction with Stevenage as well.

During the normal working week we will, say 9.00am till 5.00pm, then people report stray dogs to the local authority, whereupon action is taken whatever is required. Monday to Fridays from 5pm o'clock in the evening to 22.00, ten o'clock, then our kennels is contracted to accept dogs in from members of the public, or if they have been caught to go out and collect them. They will not come and chase one round the street to catch it. It has got to be caught prior to that.

The contact number for the kennels is, it's the:

Lodge Kennels which is on the A1 southbound, Nyrvana Jones, and it's 01462 730464.

So if you have a problem with a dog that you've caught or somebody has dumped on your doorstep and you've got hold of it, you can ring Margaret between those hours and she will come and pick it up.

This information has been advertised to the general public too via post offices, community centre and housing offices

PE - Wasn't it going to be kept sort of fairly secret so that there wasn't any hassle at the kennels in case .

KR – No.

PE - people found out that their dogs had been taken there and then went to try and repossess them. I thought it was going to be kept sort of fairly quiet.

CW - On that note that was way back when we had a contract with yourselves. We did keep these kennels quite secret because of that sort of thing, but we were forced into this situation by having to take on dogs twenty-four seven and so therefore there was no way with the money that was given to local authorities, that we could have had a pick up drop off service, so it was designated it would be purely a place where people could take dogs and of course then we had to help out and the Police have been very good in supporting certainly Margaret. When individuals have gone up there using threatening behaviour, which Ken and I are used to all day and it has worked pretty well with the Police co-operation in that respect, so that's where we are with it.

KR – The one thing that we haven't really sorted out completely is dangerous dogs. Now the Dangerous Dogs Act when it was brought in was supposed to be a shared responsibility. Local authorities don't have the funding. Hertfordshire Constabulary did agree at a meeting that they would take charge of dangerous dogs however this sometimes causes problems as to what is deemed to be a dangerous dog and the public definition of a dangerous dog is not the same as mine and Chris's and the Police

CW - explained the offences relating to dangerous dogs, a dog under Section 3 of the Act doesn't actually have to bite and we were advised by the Police, we have had quite close consultation, both Ken and I and Stevenage Borough Council and the Police and we have got it down to a sort of fine art if you like, that any person put in fear of their safety, it is clearly a Police matter. Any dog which is seriously injured by another in a public place is a Police matter. Any minor cases like the dogs chasing the cat and killing or dog causing injury to another dog which is slight, we take that on and its been quite a thing for us because we were actually taking Section 1 offences right the way down to Section 3 offences and we took quite a lot of them and then the Police said that they wanted it all back, so they've got it back but it

cost us, as Ken said, we had one dog, one I can remember a Pit Bull Terrier we seized and while the court case was pending it cost us £7,500 in about three months.

These costs were incurred due to kennelling, to have expert witnesses to clarify the characteristics of the dog were that of a Pit Bull and it all starts building up. My time spent on the case getting expert witnesses in, getting Metropolitan Police officers in because at that time Herts Police just did not want to even come and have anything to do with Section 1 dogs, so we had to rely on Herts Police, sorry Metropolitan Police and at that time the Police up in Liverpool, they were giving us every assistance but Herts Police were "oh no we don't want nothing to do with that". So that's where we were with it.

KR

KR - Last thing, what I will do to everybody that runs a kennels, in fact all of you, I will bring you a poster, so you'll know exactly who to phone and what times they are open.

Any other Business

None

Meeting closed at 3p.m.