

**Meeting of Regeneration, Culture and Adult Education Scrutiny  
Committee – 7<sup>th</sup> March 2012**

**Report of the Director of the Urban Environment**

**Stray and Illegally Grazing Horses – Policy Development**

**Purpose of Report**

1. To advise Committee of the work undertaken by the Scrutiny Committee's Working Group set up to review issues relating to stray horse and illegal grazing in the Borough and to seek the Scrutiny Committee's endorsement of the attached policy.

**Background**

2. At the meeting held on 8 June 2011 the Scrutiny Committee were advised of issues relating to stray horses and illegal grazing in the Borough, the problems being caused by such practices and the action that the Council and its partners were taking in an attempt to address these problems.
3. In order to consider the matters raised in more detail the Committee resolved to set up a working group with 3 Council Members (Councillors Turner, Islam and Mrs Simms), Police and RSPCA representatives and Council Officers as required. The remit of the Working Group was, in considering the various issues pertaining to stray horses and illegal grazing:-
  - To develop a draft policy for stray horses and illegal grazing on Council land, with due regard to practicalities and cost;
  - To present the draft policy for adoption by the Cabinet Member for Environment and Culture; and
  - To monitor performance of the trial 'Reactive Service'.
4. The performance of the trial 'Reactive Service' is a crucial element in the Council's approach to tackling the specific issue of stray horses, particularly on the highway. The problems caused by horses straying on to the highway in early 2011 were such that in terms of reports received between 13 January and 12 February 2011, of the 611 service requests received by Dudley MBC Directorates and West Midlands Police 201 calls related to animals out of which 119 were about stray horses. The level of inconvenience being caused was

considerable and the importance of finding a solution to the problem was paramount.

5. Consequently in partnership with West Midlands Police, the Council engaged a suitably qualified Service Provider who was prepared to provide the reactive service that this problem required. The Service commenced in April 2011 as a pilot to see whether a reactive service was practical in dealing with the 'highway problem' and whether it could also have a positive 'knock on' impact in other respects with the overall problem.
6. The results of the trial period have been very encouraging in a number of respects. In the first instance since the trial was started in April 2011 and up to the end of January 2012 over 120 horses have been collected and removed from on or adjacent to the highway, thereby significantly reducing the potential for accidents to occur or nuisance and inconvenience to residents.
7. At the same time the Council's Bailiff Service has also undertaken two separate impoundment exercises and these have occurred without any reprisals from aggrieved horse owners. Furthermore the number of illegally grazing horses found on Council land also appears to have reduced. The Fens Pool/Buckpool 'green wedge' had, at its peak, some 90 horses grazing on it. This figure has been reduced to approximately 30 currently.
8. As well as looking at the issue of controlling horse numbers, the Working Group has also considered animal welfare given that there has been significant levels of public concern expressed regarding this issue. In addition to the horses seized on account of them being either on or adjacent to the public highway or on Council land, the Council and the RSPCA/Redwings have also seized a number of horses on welfare grounds further reinforcing these agencies approach to this issue.
9. Finally the issue of Council grazing land was considered by the Working Group, particularly in the context of its location, condition and suitability. From the evidence submitted to the Working Group it was clear that there were sites that were currently not in use as they required significant levels of investment but that there were opportunities to work with potential graziers in terms of bringing them into use through partnership working. That said even if all of the present un let sites were made available there would still be a lengthy waiting list given that the supply of land is not able to meet the growing demand for grazing land.
10. Consequently the Working Party has developed the proposed Council policy for Stray and Illegally Grazing Horses (attached at appendix 1) for the Committee's consideration. In summary the policy endorses the Council and partners current approach as one that appears to have had success in dealing with associated problems of horse numbers on

Council land and on the highway. The crucial element in all of this has been the partnership with the Police and the engagement of a service provider. This has ensured a consistent and robust response has been made as and when required which has had added benefits in other aspects of dealing with the stray/illegal grazing problem and as the policy proposes a recommendation that this service is retained.

### **Finance**

11. The enforcement activity detailed within the report in 2011/12 has been funded from resources held by the Directorate of the Urban Environment and has been built into the budget for 2012/13 onwards.

### **Law**

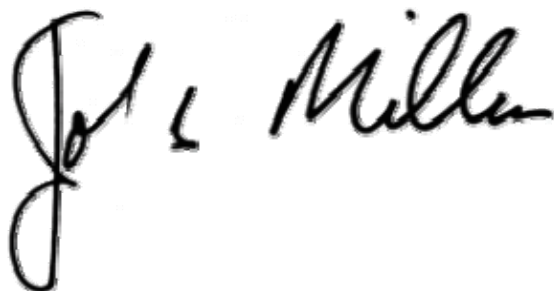
12. Section 2 of the Local Government Act 2000 enables the Council to do anything which improves the economic, social or environmental well-being of its area.

### **Equality Impact**

13. This report has taken into consideration the Council's Equality and Diversity policies and in particular its impact on certain sections of the community including Travellers and young people.

### **Recommendations**

14. It is recommended that:-
  - The Scrutiny committee considers and comments on the contents of the proposed policy attached at Appendix 1.
  - The policy, as amended, be put forward to the Cabinet Member for Environment and Culture for approval.



**J.B. MILLAR**  
**Director of the Urban Environment**

Contact Officer: Duncan Lowndes,  
Assistance Director Culture & Leisure  
[duncan.lowndes@dudley.gov.uk](mailto:duncan.lowndes@dudley.gov.uk)

## List of Background Papers

---