

CABINET

7 April 2010

ANIMAL AID COMPASSIONATE CHARTER - PETITION

REPORT OF CORPORATE DIRECTOR (OPERATIONS)

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RECENT REFERENCES:

None.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The report suggests an appropriate response to the petition submitted to Council at its meeting on 4 November 2009 by the campaigning group Animal Aid.

RECOMMENDATIONS to Cabinet and Council:

- 1 That the Animal Aid Compassionate Charter be noted.
- 2 That a modified form of the charter as set out in Appendix 1 to the report be agreed to reflect local circumstances.

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DETAIL:

1 Introduction

1.1 At its meeting on 4 November 2009 the Council received a petition from the campaigning group Animal Aid. The prayer of the petition is:

'We the undersigned call upon Winchester City Council to promote within its boundaries cruelty-free living by adopting in part or in whole the eight provisions of Animal Aid's Compassionate Charter, and the cage-free policy advocated by Compassion in World Farming, by either using barn or free-range systems where the Council is responsible for catering facilities.'

1.2 The petition goes on to identify the nine specific actions that it seeks the Council to implement in adopting the charter. These are:

1. Purchase only cruelty-free toiletries and cleaning products for Council use.
2. Ban circuses with animals from Council land.
3. Ban the giving of pets as prizes.
4. Promote and subsidise spaying and neutering programmes.
5. Promote the City as foie-gras and veal free.
6. Promote the City as fur-free.
7. Adopt only humane non-lethal management of pigeons and other animals and birds.
8. Make the City a plastic bag free zone.
9. Stop the mass release of balloons for any purpose.

DISCUSSION:

2.1 Animal Aid's website describes itself in the following terms:

"Animal Aid is the UK's largest animal rights group and one of the longest established in the world, having been founded in 1977. We campaign

peacefully against all forms of animal abuse and promote a cruelty-free lifestyle. We investigate and expose animal cruelty, and our undercover investigations and other evidence are often used by the media, bringing these issues to public attention.”

2.2 Although some people would not necessarily agree with all aspects of Animal Aid’s policies, few would dissent from its general campaigning objectives since cruelty by humans towards animals is self-evidently both unnecessary and repugnant even within a farming or pest control environment.

2.3 There is no obligation on the Council to give any endorsement of the Animal Aid charter principles but a number of them the Council has already put in place for its own reasons, whilst others could be adopted with some modification without any economic impact or particular controversy. To take each in turn:-

1. Purchase only cruelty-free toiletries and cleaning products for Council use.

Although the constituent elements of many products will have been animal tested in the past it is not necessarily difficult to source cleaning and other products which have not, themselves, been animal tested. Given the issues around contracts and occasional specialist products it is suggested that could be adopted in a slightly modified form. There might be a small cost implication in product choice but this is unlikely to be of any significance.

2. Ban circuses with animals from Council land.

This has been the Council’s policy for some years.

3. Ban the giving of pets as prizes.

This has been the Council’s policy for some years in relation to events on its own land and premises.

4. Promote and subsidise spaying and neutering programmes.

The Council already does this.

5. Promote the City as foie-gras and veal free

The Council could adopt this policy in relation to its own in-house catering operation. As it is not unlawful to serve either product it would not be possible to enforce a ban on other premises – although some have such policies of their own. Some Members will feel that this is a matter for individual choice rather than any policy decision by a local authority but there are welfare concerns that have been raised in connection with these products..

6. Promote the City as fur-free.

The attitude of individuals to wearing or buying furs is a matter for their own judgement and is not really the business of the City Council. There is no question of limiting access to Council premises or events by people who choose to wear a fur garment. Nor is it clear that there is any practical impact of promoting a 'fur free' city. However, any event on Council premises which promoted fur products would attract a high level of attention is unlikely to be accepted for practical reasons. The Council could formalise this position without any obvious impact.

7. Adopt only humane non-lethal management of pigeons and other animals and birds.

The Council would always seek to be humane in its animal control activities. Even the problems caused by rats can be controlled through better control of the environment rather than eradication. However there will be times when lethal means of control are essential for human health and this must take priority. It would not be possible to adopt this in an unmodified form.

8. Make the City a plastic bag free zone.

Almost all retailers have taken significant steps to reduce the number of plastic bags used. Making the City a plastic bag free zone is not in the Council's gift alone, but continuing to promote a reduction in the use of plastic bags fits well with other policies. The reduction of the use of plastic bags is one of the actions in the current Climate Change Action Plan.

9. Stop the mass release of balloons for any purpose.

Mass balloon releases have been controversial for some time. Again the City Council does not have power to prevent such releases and would do so on its own land or premises.

From the comments made above it can be seen that many of the key elements of the Animal Aid are already incorporated into the Council's business activities. The Animal Aid approach is to invite councils to adopt a modified version of the Charter if they feel that this would be appropriate to them. Given that issues about the Council's attitudes to these activities do arise quite regularly it is useful to have the opportunity to set out the Council's position and to state its policies. It is therefore suggested that the Council adopt its own variation of the Compassionate Charter as set out in Appendix 1. From a legal point of view it is not within the Council's power to impose a blanket ban on activities that are otherwise allowed in law, particularly insofar as it affects others. It can, however, consider restrictions on activities that it carries on either itself or permits on its own land, provided it has good management reasons to do so.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

3 SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY AND CORPORATE BUSINESS PLAN (RELEVANCE TO):

- 3.1 The need to address the issue has been prompted by the petition received rather than that Council's own business priorities. However, the principles of the proposed charter contained in Appendix 1 are consistent with the Sustainable Community Strategy.

4 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

- 4.1 There are not considered to be any significant financial implications arising from adopting the Charter as set out in Appendix 1.

5 RISK MANAGEMENT ISSUES

- 5.1 There are no risk management issues arising from the report.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

None

APPENDICES:

Appendix 1 - Proposed Winchester Compassionate Charter

CAB 1984
Appendix 1

The Council agrees that compassion in the treatment of animals is an important principle which is not incompatible with the promotion of a strong economy or support for the farming industry.

The Council will demonstrate its commitment to the principle by:

1. seeking to use products in its own activities which have a cruelty-free source and manufacturing process.
2. not allowing circuses which make use of animals on its own land.
3. not allowing animals to be given as prizes at any events on its own land or premises.
4. promoting the spaying and neutering of animals for their own welfare.
5. not selling foie-gras or veal from its own in-house catering operations.
6. not hiring its own premises for commercial events which include the sale or display of furs.
7. dealing with all pest control requirements, including lethal control where necessary, in a humane and efficient manner.
8. promoting the minimisation of plastic waste in the District.