



SOLANO COUNTY GRAND JURY
2012-13

ANIMAL CARE SERVICES

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2012-13 Solano County Grand Jury

I. SUMMARY

The 2012-13 Solano County Grand Jury elected to inquire and report on animal care services in Solano County and its cities. The Grand Jury found the delivery of services is fragmented, inefficient and confusing to the public. These services would better serve the public if consolidated.

II. INTRODUCTION

Solano County Animal Care Services and Shelter provides animal services within the County at 2510 Claybank Road, Fairfield, California. Animal Care Services is responsible for tracking rabies vaccination, dog licensing, enforcement of State and County laws pertaining to animal control and the care and housing of stray, quarantined or impounded animals. Three other agencies provide partial services to the cities within the County.

III. METHODOLOGY

- Toured Solano County Animal Care Services and Shelter
- Toured Humane Society of the North Bay in Vallejo
- Interviewed the following:
 - Solano County Animal Care Services Staff
 - Sheriff's Office Staff
 - Staff at Humane Society of the North Bay
 - Staff at Vallejo Animal Control
 - Humane Animal Services Staff in Vacaville
- Reviewed the following:
 - Solano County Animal Control Ordinances 4-139 and 4-152
 - Pet Data Incorporated Contract and Memorandum of Understanding
 - Pet Data correspondence
 - Solano County Sheriff's Animal Care Operating Procedures
 - California Health and Safety Code §121690(b)

IV. STATEMENT OF FACTS

Prior to July 2011, Animal Care Services was a division of the Solano County General Services Department and is currently under the direction of the Solano County Sheriff's Office. Solano County Animal Care Services operates the animal shelter at 2510 Claybank Road, Fairfield, California. Animal Care Services is responsible for tracking rabies vaccination, dog licensing, enforcement of State and County laws pertaining to animal control and the care and housing of stray, quarantined or impounded animals. Animal Care Services is managed and operated by a Sheriff's Lieutenant and 17 full-time employees, including animal control officers. In addition, there are four part-time employees, eight volunteers and two part-time contract veterinarians who perform spay/neuter services, as well as care for sick and injured animals in the shelter.

In 2012, the Sheriff issued an administrative order stating, "It is the goal of the Sheriff's Office that, to the greatest extent possible, abandoned animals at the Solano County Animal Shelter are adopted out rather than euthanized."

During the Grand Jury tour of the Solano County Animal Shelter, it was observed that the shelter is in need of renovations and expansion to meet the needs of Solano County. The layout is confusing to the public with the reception/office area located behind the shelter in a temporary portable building.

Solano County Animal Care Services staff informed the Grand Jury that funding for a project in the amount of \$5.4 million has been approved by the Board of Supervisors. The project will add space to the shelter, improve and reconfigure the facility and will change the location of the office reception area. The design will include 54 new inside and outside dog kennels, upgrade existing kennels and expand the spay and neuter clinic. Ground breaking is expected in 2013.

Solano County Ordinance 4-139 requires *every person owning or having control, custody, or possession of any dog over four months of age within the county shall purchase a license*. The Grand Jury was informed the Solano County General Services Department negotiated a three-year contract on July 1, 2011 with Pet Data, Incorporated of Irving, Texas. The contract requires Pet Data, Inc. (a private company) to be responsible for all dog licensing requirements, including communication with veterinarians on rabies vaccinations, processing applications for licenses, issuing licenses, send reminders to owners when licenses become due for renewal. Pet Data, Inc. has a confidentiality agreement to not share personal information of dog owners with any other entities. Sheriff's Office staff indicated they will review all aspects of the contract prior to renewal.

Solano County Animal Care Services is projected to have a budget deficit for fiscal year 2012-13. Historically, the costs of providing services exceed income generated by those services. Therefore, deficits for those services are also projected through 2017-18. Licensing revenue for 2013 is estimated to be approximately \$600,000. This revenue is divided and returned to the city where the dog resides. Of the approximate 69,000 dogs in Solano County, only 19,000 are licensed. Approximately 72 percent of the dogs in Solano County are unlicensed. It is estimated that lost revenue to Solano County and its seven cities (Benicia, Dixon, City of Suisun City, Fairfield, Rio Vista, Vacaville and Vallejo) is approximately \$1.5 million annually. This revenue, if collected, would significantly reduce the deficit in the Animal Care Services budget.

California Health and Safety Code section 121690(b) requires the reporting of rabies vaccination information to local authorities. Solano County Ordinance 4-152 requires *every licensed veterinarian in the county shall submit, at a frequency to be determined by the animal control director, but not more frequently than every two weeks, a record of the names and addresses of the owners of those dogs and cats to which he or she has administered rabies vaccinations, and a brief description of the animal vaccinated during the immediately preceding reporting period to Solano County Animal Care Services or its agent.* The Animal Care Staff has informed the Grand Jury that 20 of 37 veterinarians (54 per cent) in Solano County are not reporting rabies vaccinations. Non-compliance is a violation of Solano County Ordinance 4-152, creating inaccurate rabies vaccination information and loss of revenue.

Animal care and control services within Solano County include the retrieval of strays, surrendered animals, recovery of deceased animals and sheltering. Additional functions include the enforcement of leash laws, quarantines and licensing. There are four separate entities that provide these services in Solano County. The Solano County Sheriff's Office performs animal control services for unincorporated areas in Solano County and animal care services for the entire county, including investigating all animal bite reports. The City of Vallejo contracts with the Humane Society of the North Bay for animal control services in Vallejo. The City of Benicia has one employee designated as an animal control officer. The cities of Dixon, Fairfield, Rio Vista, Suisun City and Vacaville contract with a private company, "Humane Animal Services". The public has expressed confusion over who provides animal control services, where animals are sheltered and who to call to claim lost pets or retrieve deceased pets from public thoroughfares.

The Solano County Grand Jury toured the Humane Society of the North Bay in Vallejo (where Benicia and Vallejo animals are sheltered), the Benicia Corporation Yard pet holding pen and the Humane Animal Services office in Vacaville.

During the tour of the Humane Society of the North Bay, the Grand Jury observed dogs roaming freely in the office area due to the lack of adequate housing facilities.

The Grand Jury visited the Humane Animal Services office in Vacaville. During the visit it was observed there was only one employee present. The employee was tasked with dispatching animal control units, answering incoming calls from citizens and law enforcement agencies from five different cities. The animal control officers are dispatched using a push-to-talk cell phone and have no direct contact with the local law enforcement agency.

The Benicia Corporation Yard has temporary holding pens. The Grand Jury observed these cages to be inadequate in size and lacking proper shelter from nature's elements. The Grand Jury was informed that generally animals are not kept in the holding pens longer than 48 hours; thereafter, the animals are transferred to the Humane Society of the North Bay Vallejo Shelter.

None of these entities are under the control or direction of the Solano County Sheriff's Office.

The public has informed the Grand Jury that the delivery of animal control services in Solano County is fragmented, inefficient and confusing. The Solano County Sheriff's Office staff has indicated it has the capability to consolidate animal control services for efficiency and cost savings, should it be requested by Solano County and any of its cities.

V. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Finding 1- Fifty-four per cent of veterinarians in Solano County are not reporting rabies vaccinations to Solano County Animal Care Services, via its contracting agent, Pet Data, Incorporated, in violation of Solano County Ordinance 4-152.

Recommendation 1- Solano County Sheriff's Office enforce Solano County Ordinance 4-152.

Finding 2- Approximately, 72 per cent of dogs in Solano County are not licensed in accordance with Solano County Ordinance 4-139. This results in a significant loss of revenue that impacts the Animal Care Services budget.

Recommendation 2- Solano County Animal Care Services enforce Solano County Ordinance 4-139.

Finding 3- Animal control functions in Solano County are fragmented and confusing to the public.

Recommendation 3- The Solano County Sheriff's Office provide all animal control services for all cities and unincorporated areas of Solano County using funds generated from dog licensing and funds currently being paid by the cities to private companies for existing animal control contracts.

Finding 4- City of Benicia Corporation Yard holding pens are inadequate for housing animals.

Recommendation 4- Animals should not be housed at the Benicia Corporation Yard.

COMMENTS

The Solano County Sheriff's Office is having a positive impact on the day-to-day operations of the Solano County Animal Care Services. The Sheriff's Office is in the process of reviewing, modifying and updating their policy and procedures for the division. The Sheriff's Lieutenant assigned to Animal Care Services has consulted with all staff in the division and clarified job expectations and requirements. This has led to an increase in employee morale and performance. The Sheriff's Office staff has introduced innovative programs such as "Free Adoption Month" and "meals on wheels for pets", which delivers donated pet food to low income pet owners.

REQUIRED RESPONSES

Sheriff-Coroner, Solano County (Findings 1, 2, and 3)
Board of Supervisors, Solano County (Findings 1, 2 and 3)
Mayor, City of Benicia (Finding 3 and 4)
Mayor, City of Dixon (Finding 3)
Mayor, City of Fairfield (Finding 3)
Mayor, City of Rio Vista (Finding 3)
Mayor, City of Suisun City (Finding 3)
Mayor, City of Vacaville (Finding 3)
Mayor, City of Vallejo (Finding 3)
Chief of Police, Benicia (Finding 4)

COURTESY COPIES

Clerk, Solano County Board of Supervisors