

Friends of Swansea Horses
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The Leader of the Council and all
Cabinet Members
City and County of Swansea Council
Civic Centre
Oystermouth Road
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12 July 2016

Dear Councillor Stewart and Cabinet Members,

1 There have been major horse welfare and management issues for horses occurring across Swansea for decades. This has primarily included the unauthorised use of public spaces, particularly Council land, for the fly-grazing of horses by individuals who do not have the resources to keep horses. Many such horses are kept tethered for lengthy periods, in breach of requirements of the Animal Welfare Act and suffer very poor welfare.

2 The Council approach, as adopted by the Trading Standards Department, has been an entirely reactive one that has failed effectively to address problems and allowed them to continue unabated year-in, year-out. The failure to address these issues in an intelligent, proactive and effective way has meant that many hundreds of horses have experienced sustained suffering. They have, moreover, often been exposed to abuse.

3 Each year the authority seizes large numbers of horses and impounds them. In the period, 1st April 2013 to 30th November 2015, 553 horses were seized – an average of 198 per year. The majority of these horses are unclaimed. In the past, the authority, has simply euthanised most of these - between 2012 and 2014, 224 horses were euthanised. Subsequent to May 2014, after a link was set up following an intervention by Friends of Swansea Horses, over 250 horses have now instead gone to Hillside Animal Sanctuary. A much better outcome but still a massive demand imposed on this very kind and generous organisation. The cost of care of these horses, likely several hundred thousand pounds per year, is met by the public who respect the horse's lives.

4 The Council receives year-in, year-out large numbers of complaints or 'service requests' in relation to horse issues. The Cabinet Member for Well-being and a Healthy City's own 'Overview Report' to the Scrutiny Tethered Horses Working Group shows that between 1st April 2013 to 30th November 2015 there were 1,744 service requests related to horses – an average of 623 per year. Considerable financial costs are incurred by the Council, likely in excess of £75,000.00 per year, as well as costs imposed on the Police and other agencies.

5 The local community has expressed widespread concern, frustration and disgust concerning the keeping of horses in poor conditions on public spaces across Swansea.

FOSH submitted a 2,000 signature petition calling for a ban on tethering of horses on such spaces. Earlier a 1,000 post-card campaign had been mounted to the Leader of the Council. In 2007, the Pettifor Trust submitted a similar petition of 1700 signatures. The problems and public concern carries on year-in, year-out. The local community suffers loss of public amenity, risk, and quite often intimidation if objections are raised to horses being inappropriately kept. Were accident associated with horses kept on Council land to occur, then the Council is potentially liable.

6 The recently convened Scrutiny Tethered Horses Working Group, under the Chairmanship of Councillor Jeff Jones considered the detailed evidence Friends of Swansea Horses had provided and much else. It recommended that a pilot scheme be introduced to prohibit the unauthorised keeping of horses in one area of Swansea, with a six-month lead time and notice period. This had the potential to communicate clearly that public spaces were not to be used for the keeping of horses, with the potential to start to end the repetitive cycle of horses being obtained cheaply, placed on land as free-livery, neglected, seized, and then replaced.

7 But, the recommendations were dismissed out of hand by the Cabinet Member for Well-being and Healthy City, seemingly in complete disregard of all of the evidence outlined above. The reason, purportedly that the costs of provision of public land for licensed grazing would be prohibitive and had not been 'thought through'. Yet, the proposal by the Tethered Horses Working Group for use of licensed grazing was an ancillary one, and not core to the principle of communicating and enforcing an end to the assumption that horses can be kept on public spaces without authorisation. What is essential is that the presumed use of such spaces is ended. Effective communication by the authority and enforcement of this principle with suitable notice is essential to change the context. There is no 'right' to public grazing provision, but such facilities may be supportive of a transition to this, and might be provided on a high-welfare contract basis, to suitable owners. The Leader of the Council has stated that, *'The Council do not give permission for public land to be used for keeping of horses whether tethered or not'* (Rob Stewart, 2014). Yet, this is entirely at odds with the reality of what continues to be allowed and to widely occur.

8 The issue of 'Council' costs is an interesting one. As indicated above, by the failure of Swansea to address its horse management and welfare issues massive financial costs are imposed on others – essentially members of the public. The sanctuary has taken on over 250 horses since May 2014. Since most of these would previously have been euthanised, this has directly saved the Council likely in excess of £50,000 in euthanasia costs alone (average cost of euthanasia from Council figures: £228.50 for vet call out, euthanasia and carcase disposal.). The sanctuary has also taken on all of the transport costs, which are very substantial – not a hint of Council contribution or support for this. It is not O.K. for the Council to avoid relevant expenditure and consequently impose very significant financial costs on others.

9 The policy and practice of the authority to date has effectively been determined entirely by relevant officers. There has been a policy vacuum within which officers have operated. No thought for the issue or effective guiding policy has ever been produced by elected members or the Cabinet in particular. Officers have, in this limbo, for years presumed to adopt a reactive approach, astonishingly never stepping back to consider how the sustained and repetitive problems might be effectively

prevented or shown any initiative to do so. No coherent intervention or sustained multi-agency working has occurred, despite claims by officers to the contrary. Periodic liaison with other agencies in response to specific incidents does not constitute meaningful multi-agency working, which requires to be sustained and planful to be effective. Evidence was provided to the Scrutiny Working Group of the practice of other authorities, including particularly that of Hartlepool Borough Council which has had similar horse-related problems but has intervened effectively to address these. It has been claimed by authority officers that Swansea already adopts similar practices, but this is false. The approach of Hartlepool has been sustained and focused. It has been successful but the ad hoc approach adopted by Swansea has not.

10 In the last two years that Friends of Swansea Horses has campaigned on the issue of tethered and fly-grazed horses on public spaces in Swansea, we have been met with the same repetitive, defensive response by the authority. While all evidence clearly indicates that 'more of the same' is the last thing that is needed, given the continued occurrence of the problems for many years if not decades, the response of the authority has been, defensively, 'we're doing everything we should'. This is weak, fails to acknowledge the horse welfare issues, fails to acknowledge the concerns of the community and fails to be responsible in relation to use of Council resources.

11 Friends of Swansea Horses has been particularly concerned that the Scrutiny process has been treated with disregard by the Cabinet Member for Well-being and Healthy City. It has appeared to us that at no point was he open-minded about the issue, but from the first presumed to adopt the position provided to him by relevant officers. His response, as that of Trading Officers too, has been patronising and unconcerned with the detailed and thorough evidence provided of the harms of failing to intervene in a planful and constructive manner.

12 The Cabinet should not disregard this matter. At the moment it appears, yet again, that nothing is to be done. This is not good enough. First and foremost the horses deserve better. So does the community affected by the abuse of these public spaces. Friends of Swansea Horses' estimate is that about 250 horses are currently kept inappropriately on public spaces across Swansea. We believe that probably only about 50 or so individuals are responsible for these. Can it really be the case that the City and County of Swansea Council is too weak to challenge these?

13 We look forward to a reasoned, coherent and proactive policy from the Cabinet that will effectively address these long-standing problems, protecting the interests of the horses and the community, rather than avoiding them.

Thank you.

Yours sincerely,

David Grimsell
On behalf of Friends of Swansea Horses (FOSH)

cc Councillor Jeff Jones, Convenor Tethered Horses Working Group
Members of Tethered Horses Working Group
Councillor Mary Jones, Chair, Scrutiny Programmes Committee