

Title of Report: Actions to address Dog Fouling within Derry City & Strabane District Council	Officer Presenting: Director of Health and Community Author: Head of Health & Community Wellbeing
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1 Purpose of Report/Recommendations

- 1.1 To advise members on and seek members' view on the implementation of actions raised previously at Health and Community Committee and Council meetings and provide an update on the responsible dog ownership awareness campaign by Council Departments in order to tackle dog fouling in the council area.

2 Background

- 2.1 Dog fouling is currently governed by The Fouling on Land by Dogs (Derry City and Strabane District Council) Order 2015. It is currently Council's policy to offer the person in charge of the dog a Fixed Penalty Notice offering them the opportunity to discharge any liability for the offence by payment of a fixed penalty.
- 2.2 The Covid pandemic and associated lockdowns has resulted in an increase in dogs being walked in popular paths and public walkways. Dog foul bins are strategically located across the council area and the Environment section has reported that over 85 tonnes of dog waste was collected in 2020 which is a significant increase from 50 tonnes collected in 2019. This demonstrates that the vast majority of dog owners are responsible and adhere to their statutory responsibility to remove and dispose of dog foul appropriately. Unfortunately, the minority of irresponsible dog owners have a significant negative impact on everyone else's enjoyment of the outdoor environment.
- 2.3 Promoting dog licensing and raising awareness of the Dog Control Orders will be a fundamental part of the messaging throughout the duration of the campaign. This will be complemented with the installation of the new Dog Control Order signage at the Council owned green spaces and designated areas throughout the district.
- 2.4 In addition, each dog owner will receive leaflets in relation to "Responsible Dog Ownership" and "Dog Fouling" within the reminder renewal letter for their dog licence.

2.5 All complaints received by the Dog Control Service are investigated and additional proactive patrols of problem areas are also undertaken. In order to serve a Fixed Penalty Notice an authorised council officer must witness the fouling take place.

3 Key Issues

3.1 The primary objective of the Dog Control Service is to promote responsible dog ownership throughout the Council area through education and enforcement activities as prioritised within the work plan.

3.2 The campaign will take place in a number of phases over the coming months as follows:-

3.2.1 The Dog Control Service will increase patrols along with the Litter Wardens and Park Rangers to deter dog fouling. Staff within leisure services who are currently on furlough will provide support through patrols. Cleansing will continue to clean problem areas and liaise closely with all enforcement officers so that patrols can be targeted more effectively. New dog fouling and dog control orders signage will be erected.

3.2.2 Enforcement

Anyone observed by dog wardens or litter wardens failing to clean up after their dog will be issued with an £80 fixed penalty notice. Failure to pay the fixed penalty notice will result in court proceedings, where the maximum fine is £1000. Where appropriate CCTV signage and cameras are installed in areas experiencing problems with dog fouling for a temporary period of time in order to deter and obtain evidence of environmental crime.

3.2.3 Cross departmental working

As recommended in the Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful- Cleaner Neighbourhoods Report 2019/20, Council is in the process of implementing a joined up/cross directorate approach to tackle dog fouling. Officers within the dog control, street cleaning and parks sections of council are now working closely to deal with dog fouling and litter offences. Streetscape, Waste Enforcement, Parks Development and Dog Control staff will communicate regularly regarding problem areas and attend Cross-Departmental monthly meetings.

3.2.4 Awareness Raising Campaign /Patrols:

Staff within leisure services including those on furlough will assist casual staff and enforcement officers within the Health and Community and Environment and Regeneration Directorates to carry out proactive dog control patrols across the council area during early mornings, late evenings and weekends over a 4 – 6 week period. Particular focus will be given to popular walkways and parks used by large numbers of people who are directly affected by this antisocial behaviour.

3.2.5 Staff will patrol areas outlined in Appendix 1, wearing high visibility bibs, and offer where appropriate and subject to Covid risk assessment, free poop scoop bags to dog owners and promote responsible dog ownership. Staff will also report any evidence of dog foul so that enforcement officers and staff within the cleansing department can respond quickly.

3.2.6 The Litter Wardens within streetscape and Park Rangers will ensure compliance in parks and will be supported by the dog wardens.

3.2.7 **Signage**

Dog fouling signage will be erected along popular walkways, arterial routes, entrances to Council parks; and in areas which have been evidenced by enforcement officers and cleansing operatives as being problematic with dog fouling

3.2.8 New signage relating to Dog Control Orders will be designed in cooperation with Parks Development. Signage will be installed along popular walkways, in parks and in areas where evidenced based dog fouling is an issue. In addition to new signage being installed there will be a Council web link clearly showing all the Dog Control areas and the location of all Council's dog foul bins.

3.2.9 **Media and Marketing to encourage behavioural change**

Approximately 3,500 text messages have been issued to dog owners during the month of January 2021 outlining the importance of responsible dog ownership.

3.2.10 A Dog Fouling press and social media campaign has taken place between 01 January and 09 February 2021 in order to promote responsible dog ownership and seek support from the general public (Appendix 2). The Council and Mayor's social media activity on this issue has reached over 478,000 people with almost 1,500 people having engaged and shared the posts during the month of January 2021. The council's media team are taking a proactive role in pre-recording a series of video messages with the Mayor and members of the Dog Control team at various hot spots across the Council area and there will be an increase in social media messaging over the coming weeks.

3.2.11 The marketing plan (Appendix 3) includes extensive advertising and signage including pavement graphics (street art) and Digital billboards across the council area over a four-week period.

3.2.12 Staff participating in the dog control patrols will provide dog walkers with dog bags and those responsible dog owners who have dog bags will be entered into a prize draw.

3.2.13 The Dog Control Service hope to build on these social media awareness campaigns by working closely with the Council's Media and Marketing teams to promote an on-going marketing and communications campaign to communicate the overarching key message of responsible dog ownership throughout the year.

3.2.14 As a result of this, increased patrols were undertaken by dog wardens and litter wardens targeting problem areas, in addition to increased frequency of cleaning by cleansing staff. This has led to a gradual decrease in dog fouling complaints for the last quarter of 2020.

3.2.15 Dog DNA Registration:

This matter has been raised by the DCSDC representative at the Northern Ireland Dog Advisory Group (NIDAG), which is a NI wide grouping of Council Officers that deal with Dog Control matters.

3.2.16 There is no legal requirement for DNA registration which costs £40. The cost of analysing dog fowl is £70 per sample. A minimum uptake of 60-70% of all dogs in the council area would be required in order to begin a DNA sampling programme to identify irresponsible dog owners.

3.2.17 The most successful use of dog DNA registration to date is within gated communities where people can be compelled to register before being allowed to own a dog. The use of dog DNA for identifying dogs that are fouling would be a very useful tool if it became a legal requirement for all dog owners to register their dogs on a DNA database.

3.2.18 In the absence of a statutory requirement for dog owners to register their dogs DNA the level of registration would be very low. It is unlikely that irresponsible dog owners would avail of this scheme on a voluntary basis and therefore dog foul sampling for DNA would be both cost prohibitive and ineffective.

4 Financial, Equality, Legal, HR, Improvement, Rural Needs and other Implications

- 4.1 The Marketing plan (Appendix 3) will cost approximately £15,000 over a 4 – 6 week period.
- 4.2 An additional 40,000 dog fouling bags have been ordered at a cost of £2,000.
- 4.3 Staff within the leisure services section will be brought off the furlough scheme to assist with the dog control patrols and associated initiatives for a period of 4 - 6 weeks. Overtime payments will be required as patrols will be carried out between 8am and 8pm seven days each week.
- 4.4 All other costs associated will be covered by existing budgets and penalty receipts.
- 4.5 Enforcement of statutory requirements will be in accordance with Council's Enforcement Policy, the Northern Ireland Dog Advisory Group (NIDAG) Guidance for Council Enforcement Officers, and DEARA Guidance to District Councils: dog control orders.
- 4.6 Council will follow the Council CCTV Policy and Operating Procedure and undertake the use of mobile CCTV in accordance with criteria laid down under the Privacy Impact Assessment in detecting and deterring environmental crime.

5 Recommendations

- 5.1 It is recommended that the Members note and make comment on the measures being taken and future initiatives being planned to help address dog fouling in the council area.

Background Documents

Appendix 1: Patrols

Appendix 2: Dog fouling Media clippings

Appendix 3: Dog Fouling Marketing Campaign

[Responsible Dog Ownership](#)

Minute Refs: C27/21; HC13/21; HC124/20