



Enterprise and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee

Scrutiny Project Group

report on Dog Fouling

Date: January 2015

PROJECT GROUP MEMBERS:

Councillors:

Lead	Jean Innes
Group Members	Andy Slack Bob Gibson

1.0 INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW AIMS

1.1 This review aims to look at and build upon the Council's existing policies and plans to address dog fouling in the borough, including consideration of:

- How the service and its staff currently operate and if there are any areas for potential improvement
- Residents' perceptions of dog fouling as a problem in their area
- How the service communicates with residents, and residents' awareness of the service
- Looking at setting best practice in relation to how the service communicates with residents

2.0 REASONS FOR THE REVIEW AND LINK TO PRIORITIES

2.1 The review came about as members of the Community Assemblies had raised the issue of dog fouling in the borough as an area of concern with their elected members.

2.2 In Chesterfield Borough Council's 2013 Survey of Tenants and Residents 27.2% of respondents thought that dog fouling was a major problem in their area.

2.3 The review directly links into the Corporate Plan priority of improving the quality of life for local people and the aim of keeping the borough's streets, parks and open spaces clean, tidy and well managed.

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

The Project Group recommends:

3.1 That it is noted that the Environmental Services, Street Scene Team provides an excellent service to residents of the borough. However, the project group recommends that a review of staff resources for the enforcement team be carried out as the project group recognises that while the existing staff do a good job, going over and above what is expected of them, that their impact is limited by there only being a FTE of 1.5 Enforcement Officer posts dedicated to dealing with dog fouling.

3.2 That the potential of the Neighbourhood Wardens is fully realised and that they receive extra training in carrying out enforcement action, so to feel more confident and able to issue penalty notices. The project group makes this recommendation as there are 5 FTE Neighbourhood Warden posts and 3 FTE Enforcement Officer posts (with FTE 1.5 dealing with dog fouling), and see the Neighbourhood Wardens as a potentially underutilised resource as they are out and about in, and have a good understanding of local communities in the borough.

Also that the potential for more collaborative working between the Neighbourhoods team, and Environmental Services Street Scene team, as a result of the provisions under the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014, is looked at.

3.3 That new and functioning mobile phones are purchased for the Environmental Services, Street Scene Team as the current phones are old and often do not work. New phones would benefit effective communication, increase service responsiveness as well as contributing to the health and safety of staff working in non office based roles. Up to date phones would also enable staff to communicate via social media and allow the Environmental Services, Street Scene Team to work within the “digital first approach” contained in the Council’s External Communications Strategy.

3.4 That a review of the provision of dog bins in the borough takes place. This should look at the location, usage and number of bins so that it can be determined if dog bin provision is an effective use of resources or if the resources could be spent more effectively providing standard bins which can be used to dispose of dog waste as well as general litter.

- 3.5 To recommend that on all temporary signs and notices that are produced to discourage dog fouling that the maximum fine of “up to £1000” be used in the wording as is done by Bassetlaw District Council. Also to recommend that Bassetlaw District Council be contacted to see if the effective and innovative imagery on their signs can be borrowed and to enable the sharing of best practice.
- 3.6 That a coordinated and structured approach to communication and engagement with residents of the borough to include school engagement, community engagement, key message delivery and advertising, is adopted.

Greater coordination in the planning and use of existing resources has the potential to have a bigger impact than the current uncoordinated approach and will also be a more effective use of existing resources and provide better outcomes in these financially difficult times, i.e. increased public awareness that Chesterfield Borough Council deals effectively with dog fouling and a reduction of dog fouling in targeted areas.

Better coordination and consequent outcomes could be met by:

- Running campaigns by area so to make a splash rather than scattering messages in an unfocused and disparate way across the borough. This approach will also be more appealing to the media than disparate scattered activity.
- Establishing a campaign group to meet two to three times a year, comprising of members, Environmental Services, Street Scene Team officers and the Communications and Marketing Manager. The group would monitor the impact of communication, community engagement and advertising and would discuss and formulate future plans and priorities for communicating and engaging with residents.

4.0 REVIEW APPROACH

4.1 The review was carried out by:

- a) Reviewing the current service provision and its effectiveness along with how the service communicates with residents by holding project group meetings which were attended by:

- Russell Sinclair, Environmental Health Manager
 - Sherri Stock, Senior Environmental Health Officer, Streetscene
 - Mark Rawson, Dog Control Officer
 - John Fern, Communications and Marketing Manager
 - Cllr Chris Ludlow, Executive Member for Environment
 - Cllr Sarah Hollingworth, Assistant Executive Member for Environment
 - Cllr Martin Stone, Assistant Executive Member for Housing
- b) Reviewing the responses to the feedback form on dog fouling (**Appendix A**) which was sent to all Community Assembly members asking for their views and opinions on dog fouling in their area and the service that Chesterfield Borough Council provided. This allowed the group to gain the views of residents so that these could feed into the group's considerations.

5.0 EVIDENCE AND RESEARCH

- 5.1 The information received via the responses from the feedback form on dog fouling sent to Community Assembly members was collated and analysed for trends (**Appendix B**). The information received was then considered by the project group members and assisted them in formulating their recommendations.

6.0 REVIEW FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

- 6.1 It was essential when starting out on this review that the project group should get to know how the service currently operates. To provide this insight and specialist knowledge, Sherri Stock, Senior Environmental Health Officer Environmental Services – Streetscene was invited to attend the project group meetings. The officer provided project group members with both a strategic and day to day operational understanding of the current service provision.
- 6.2 The project group meetings were also attended by Mark Rawson who as an Enforcement Officer was able to give project group members an invaluable insight to how the service operates from the perspective of a frontline member of staff who deals with dogs and dog fouling issues everyday and in different parts of the borough.
- 6.3 It quickly became apparent from the discussions that the staff involved were highly motivated to provide a good service to residents

and were always looking at ways of improving and innovating in how the service is provided. The group was very impressed with the positive “can do” attitude shown by the team and their determination to provide a high level of service despite budget cuts and reductions in staff over recent years. There was concern though from the project group members that in such a service where officers are out and about in the borough, reductions in staffing do have a detrimental impact on service provision, for example being present to witness incidents of dog fouling and issuing the subsequent fixed penalty notices.

- 6.4 Currently there is the FTE of three Enforcement Officers covering the borough, and the FTE of five Neighbourhood Warden posts covering the council’s housing estates. Enforcement Officers also carry out other work including pest control so the amount of staff resource devoted to dealing with dog fouling is estimated to be 1.5 FTE
- 6.5 Elected Members on the project group all advised that the number of complaints they received in relation to problems with dog fouling in their wards had decreased noticeably from levels received only a few years ago.
- 6.6 Officers reported that over the last few years incidents of anti social dog fouling had decreased but that the number of fixed penalty notices had remained the same which indicated that only a persistent hardcore of offenders remained and that the service’s activities had been effective in reducing “casual dog fouling”. Currently there are no key performance indicators to measure service delivery in relation to dog fouling, but the group were satisfied from the information provided by officers, that dog fouling was being dealt with effectively. The subsequent consultation with Community Assembly members reinforced the fact that the service was performing and delivering, with respondents noting that dog fouling in their areas had visibly decreased. The responses to the consultation also indicated that residents were happy with the service when they came into contact with it, and that staff were very helpful when dealing with their problem or query. **(Appendix B)**

RECOMMENDATION:

That it is noted that the Environmental Services, Street Scene Team provides an excellent service to residents of the borough. However, the project group recommends that a review of staff resources for the enforcement team be carried out as the project group recognises that while the existing staff do a good job, going over and above what is expected of them, that their impact is limited by there only being a FTE of 1.5 Enforcement Officer posts dedicated to dealing with dog fouling.

- 6.7 Neighbourhood Wardens are out in the borough on a day to day basis and have a good knowledge of local areas and communities.
- 6.8 Neighbourhood Wardens are authorised to issue fixed penalty notices and in some cases have issued them, but this does not happen frequently.
- 6.9 The new provisions in the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 provide opportunities for more and different types of enforcement action to be carried out by more officers (such as Neighbourhood Wardens) such as Dog Behaviour Contracts, Dog Control Notices and Orders. Due to these changes there is potential for more collaborative working between the Neighbourhoods team, and Environmental Services Street Scene team.
- 6.10 There is currently some collaborative working with Neighbourhood Wardens and Environmental Services working in dog fouling “hotspots” to encourage residents to educate dog owners on the environmental and health costs of dog fouling.
- 6.11 For Neighbourhood Wardens to be as effective as possible in regard to dealing with dog fouling they need to be confident in dealing with, and pursuing enforcement action, including issuing penalty charge notices. There has in the past been training given to Neighbourhood Wardens by Environmental Services officers on enforcement action.
- 6.12 The project group recognises that the changes made by the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 may take time to implement due to the wide ranging changes it has introduced, but also see the opportunities it offers for more and more varied types of enforcement, such as Dog Behaviour Contracts.

RECOMMENDATION

That the potential of the Neighbourhood Wardens is fully realised and that they receive extra training in carrying out enforcement action, so to feel more confident and able to issue penalty notices. The project group makes this recommendation as there are 5 FTE Neighbourhood Wardens and 3 FTE Enforcement Officer posts (with FTE 1.5 dealing with dog fouling), and see the Neighbourhood Wardens as a potentially underutilised resource as they are out and about in, and have a good understanding of local communities in the borough.

Also that the potential for more collaborative working between the Neighbourhoods team, and Environmental Services Street Scene team, as a result of the provisions under the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 is looked at.

- 6.13 With Chesterfield Borough Council adopting a new External Communications Strategy which includes an increased use of social media as a way of the Council communicating and interacting with residents the project group were keen that Enforcement Officers should use social media when they are out and about in the borough to highlight what they were doing in a modern and cost effective way. Officers advised that while they thought this was a good idea it was currently not possible as the phones that the team used were old and did not support accessing the web.
- 6.14 At Chesterfield Borough Council social media is used via the Communications and Marketing Manager, but this does not show what the Enforcement and the other Officers are doing on a day to day basis out and about in the borough to deal with, and reduce incidents of dog fouling. Other local authority Enforcement Officers and Dog Wardens, such as those at Bassetlaw District Council use Facebook to communicate their day to day activities with their local residents as shown in **Appendix D**.
- 6.15 The phones that the team use are unreliable and often do not work.

RECOMMENDATION:

That new and functioning mobile phones are purchased for the Environmental Services, Street Scene Team as the current phones are old and often do not work. New phones would benefit effective communication, increase service responsiveness as well as contributing to the health and safety of staff working in non office based roles. Up to date phones would also enable staff to communicate via social media and allow the Environmental Services, Street Scene Team to work within the “digital first approach” contained in the Council’s External Communications Strategy.

- 6.16 There are approximately 1,200 litter bins and 450 dog waste bins in the borough and over 40% of responses to the consultation with Community Assembly members mentioned the provision of dog bins as an area of concern. **See Appendix B.** Some respondents thought that more dog bins should be provided to encourage owners to dispose of dog waste responsibly, while other respondents thought that dog bins should be removed totally and that the resources used to provide and service them be redeployed into providing more enforcement. There were also several comments that dog bins were not located where they were needed most and that they were not emptied regularly.
- 6.17 Dog waste can be placed in normal litter bins and there have been previous campaigns to advise owners that “any bin will do”, but it is not known how well known this fact is amongst dog owners. This information is however given on the dog fouling section on the Chesterfield Borough Council website.
- 6.18 The dog waste collection route has been recently rationalised to introduce efficiencies including larger bins that are visited at most weekly. A policy has also been introduced to use more dual purpose litter and dog bins so that separate teams are not needed for collections and emptying.
- 6.19 It is estimated that the cost of providing dog bins (including on-costs, labour, vehicles and fuel in undertaking the emptying of bins/cleaning/repairs due to vandalism and ad hoc visits to clear excess fouling at sites where it is left un-bagged), even after these efficiencies is approximately £50,000 a year.

RECOMMENDATION:

That a review of the provision of dog bins in the borough takes place. This should look at the location, usage and number of bins so that it can be determined if dog bin provision is an effective use of resources or if the resources could be spent more effectively providing standard bins which can be used of to dispose dog waste as well as general litter.

- 6.20 Over the years Chesterfield Borough Council has run a range of campaigns to encourage responsible dog ownership and for owners to pick up and dispose of dog fouling. As shown at paragraphs 6.5 and 6.6 of this report incidents of dog fouling have decreased so it can be seen that these campaigns have succeeded in changing behaviour and making cleaning up after your dog the norm.
- 6.21 Campaigning and promotional activities have included poster campaigns and engagement with schools and local communities by officers. Advertising such as posters on lampposts and notice boards needs to be continuously reviewed and refreshed as their impact declines with time as they become part of the street scene landscape so temporary signs and posters rather than large amounts of permanent signage is used.
- 6.22 Poster imagery used has varied widely over the years and currently posters using the imagery of an owl's eyes are being used to get the message across that people who allow their dogs to foul are being watched. Project group members liked this campaign and agreed that the imagery was effective in discouraging dog fouling.
- 6.23 Legislation states that the maximum fine for not clearing up dog fouling can be up to £1000, however the majority of advertising used by Chesterfield Borough Council refers to the maximum fixed penalty notice fine allowed of £80.
- 6.24 Advertising campaigns and poster imagery used by other local authorities were reviewed by the group and it was agreed that the imagery, wording and style of Bassetlaw District Council's "Dob on a Dirty Dog" campaign (**Appendix C**) was both modern and also gave a strong message that not clearing up dog fouling was not acceptable. The campaign while hard hitting and unambiguous in its message showed a light touch and a humorous tone which appealed to members.

- 6.25 The Bassetlaw District Council campaign also appealed to the group as the posters clearly stated that allowing your dog to foul can lead to a fine of “up to £1000” which they thought was more hard hitting and more likely to attract the attention of the hardcore of owners who still allow their dogs to foul rather than referring to the maximum fixed penalty notice of £80.
- 6.26 As legislation can change in regard to the amount of fines and penalties that can be issued the project group agreed that specific wording in relation to the amount of fines and penalties should only be used on temporary notices and poster campaigns.

RECOMMENDATION

That Cabinet considers using the maximum fine wording of “up to £1000” on all temporary signs and posters that are produced to discourage dog fouling as is done by Bassetlaw District Council. Also to recommend that Bassetlaw District Council be contacted to see if the effective and innovative imagery on their signs can be borrowed and to enable the sharing of best practice.

- 6.27 On reviewing the current activities, achievements and service delivery, group members were satisfied that the Street Scene Team provided an excellent service to residents of the borough. Elected members had advised however, that while the number of complaints they received in relation to problems with dog fouling from residents in their wards had decreased noticeably from levels received only a few years ago, dog fouling was still an issue that residents had concerns about, and wanted to see Chesterfield Borough Council doing more to deal with.
- 6.28 While the Street Scene Team are providing an excellent service residents appear to lack awareness of this, and as the elected members report, residents still raise it as an area of concern. It appears that residents currently have a perception that Chesterfield Borough Council is not doing enough to deal with dog fouling as they lack information on what the service is doing and achieving in regard to dealing with, and reducing dog fouling. Information on enforcement action taken and fines issued is available on the Chesterfield Borough Council but is not very easy to find.
- 6.29 In response to this lack of awareness the obvious thing would be to have a high profile and borough wide campaign aimed at discouraging dog fouling with activity such as a poster campaign and

high profile advertising on bin lorries and other Chesterfield Borough Council vehicles. This however would be counter productive, as while residents still raise fouling as an area of concern, these concerns are from a minority, and having such a large campaign could provide a misleading message to the majority that dog fouling is a large borough wide problem, rather than a problem in specific areas caused by a hardcore of irresponsible dog owners.

- 6.30 Increased communications and publicity, instead of being borough wide and using a broad message aimed at discouraging dog fouling, needs to be more specific and targeted in the messages it is delivering, and at the audiences which it is targeting.
- 6.31 The first key message that needs to be delivered is that Chesterfield Borough Council is taking effective action at reducing dog fouling and dealing with irresponsible dog owners. This message needs to be targeted borough wide and to all residents
- 6.32 The second key message that needs to be delivered is that not clearing up dog fouling, and allowing dogs out on to streets and open spaces to foul is not acceptable. This message needs to be targeted in specific problem areas in the borough and at the hardcore of irresponsible dog owners.
- 6.33 For communication of key messages to be effective all publicity, advertising, school and community engagement activities need to be coordinated to ensure that they are giving a consistent message at all times, with all activity reaffirming key communication and message objectives.
- 6.34 The project group was advised by the Communications and Marketing Manager that a greater and more publicly noticeable impact could be achieved with the use of existing resources by not only coordinating publicity and community engagement, but by also planning and focussing these activities on specific areas or wards at any one time, rather than in trying to communicate a message borough wide all at once. This coordinated and planned approach to publicity and community engagement would then make a “splash” in one specific area and therefore make a greater impact than in spreading resources more thinly over a larger area. This approach would also make any publicity activity or community engagement more appealing to the media as a story as it would be more of an “event”. This approach would then allow activity to be rotated around different parts

of the borough on a scale that would engage public and media interest.

RECOMMENDATION

That a coordinated and structured approach to communication and engagement with residents of the borough to include school engagement, community engagement, key message delivery and advertising, is adopted.

Greater coordination in the planning and use of existing resources has the potential to have a bigger impact than the current uncoordinated approach and will also be a more effective use of existing resources and provide better outcomes in these financially difficult times, i.e. increased public awareness that Chesterfield Borough Council deals effectively with dog fouling and a reduction of dog fouling in targeted areas.

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- Establishing a campaign group to meet two to three times a year, comprising of members, Environmental Services, Street Scene Team officers and the Communications and Marketing Manager. The group would monitor the impact of communication, community engagement and advertising and would discuss and formulate future plans and priorities for communicating and engaging with residents.

7.0 REVIEW CONCLUSIONS

- 7.1 The project group sees that while the service provided in relation to dog fouling is good, there is potential to provide an improved and more responsive service by reviewing how existing resources are used.
- 7.2 The project group sees great opportunities for better communication with residents and increasing their awareness of the service by utilising the expertise of the Communications and Marketing team to ensure residents get to know all about the great work that Environmental Services Officers are doing in the borough.
- 7.3 The review and its focus has had direct input from local residents with the consultation with Community Assembly members. Their input has been directly reflected in the project group's focus and its recommendations. The project would like to note the benefit of involving residents and that this should be seen as best practice for all scrutiny reviews.

APPENDICES:

- (A)** Scrutiny Project Group on Dog Fouling Community Assembly Feedback Form
- (B)** Summary and analyses of responses received from Community Assembly Feedback Forms
- (C)** Bassetlaw District Council's communication materials used to discourage dog fouling
- (D)** Bassetlaw District Council Facebook activity

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