

WIRRAL COUNCIL

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 18TH NOVEMBER 2009

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF TECHNICAL SERVICES

LOCAL ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY DELIVERY PLAN UPDATE

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 This report updates Members on the current position of the Local Environmental Quality (LEQ) delivery plan for 2009/10. The plan has been prepared and monitored by Technical Services in partnership with Biffa Waste Services, Regeneration, Neighbourhood Management Projects and local housing associations. The plan aims to achieve a number of LEQ objectives in order to support the delivery of the Council's Corporate Plan and Wirral Local Area Agreement (LAA).

2.0 BACKGROUND

2.1 Context of LEQ

There are a number of aspects of LEQ that contribute to overall quality of life within communities. Increasingly, health practitioners and researchers are proving the benefits of good quality local environment to the health and wellbeing of individuals. At a recent Super Regional Meeting organised by Keep Britain Tidy (KBT) on behalf of DEFRA, the Department of Health presented a number of research findings that linked poor LEQ with three key health risks:

- Physical Inactivity
- Social Impacts (people not getting out and about and socialising within their community)
- Air pollution.

For example, People who feel safe in their locality are more likely to be physically active. If levels of graffiti and litter are high, people are likely to be 50% less active and as such more likely to be obese. People who have access to good quality parks and open spaces are three times less likely to be inactive and 40% less likely to be obese.

There is also industry wide recognition that poor LEQ can encourage other anti-social behaviour that if kept unchecked could spiral into more significant crimes. This theory is known as the "Broken Windows Effect", made famous by Rudolph Giuliani during his time as New York's Mayor.

Finally, the emphasis that Wirral resident's themselves place on LEQ is demonstrated at area forums and through customer consultation such as the Residents' Survey. Through analysis of the customer queries raised to the

Council so far in 2009/10, “Street Cleansing”, “Fly Tipping”, “Hedges and Shrubs” and “Parks and Countryside” are 4 of the service areas receiving the highest volume of queries made by Elected Members and MPs on behalf of their constituents.

2.2 LEQ and the strategic fit in Wirral

Wirral achieved its BV199 (predecessor to National Indicator 195) “stretch” target for 2008/2009 and as such received a reward grant of £ £818,635. Wirral Council continue to recognise the importance of LEQ to its residents and therefore included the National Indicator, NI 195, in the LAA. This indicator measures the cleanliness of our streets and open spaces with regards to (a) Litter, (b) Detritus, (c) Graffiti and (d) Fly posting. In addition, Wirral has a local indicator that measures the standard of cleanliness in our 5% most deprived areas by monitoring the percentage of streets and open spaces that fail to meet cleansing standards with regards to litter and detritus (combined score), using NI195 survey methodology. Progress with this indicator is detailed in section 3.2. Both targets support the achievement of Wirral’s Corporate Objective of creating “*exemplary standards of street cleanliness*” and are LAA priorities.

2.3 LEQ Delivery Plan Governance

At its meeting on the 7th of April 2009, The Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee endorsed the LEQ project plan (minute 37 refers). The latest version of the delivery plan is appended to this report. The Living and Working Environment Partnership are responsible for co-ordinating the Delivery Plan actions. Six weekly meetings are chaired by Wirral Council Technical Services as the lead statutory body responsible for local environmental quality issues. The core aims of the partnership are to:

- Maintain and improve the standard of the local environment for residents and businesses through effective partnership working between key agencies and organisations
- Monitor, review, report and take corrective action for the improvement plans relating to the Living and Working Environment Partnership that set out to achieve the SCS and LAA Improvement Priorities
- Optimise the use of available partner resources to achieve Living and Working Environment objectives through effective working and communication between partner organisations and use of performance/management information
- Promote effective engagement and consultation with local communities and neighbourhoods to facilitate in particular the community and voluntary sector for the achievement of Living and Working Environment objectives.

Overall progress and key risks associated with the achievement of annual LAA targets are monitored by the Local Strategic Partnership.

The Cabinet Member for Streetscene and Transport and the Technical Services Senior Management Team also regularly monitor progress on the delivery plan actions throughout the year

3.0 PERFORMANCE OVERVIEW

3.1 Borough wide NI195 Performance

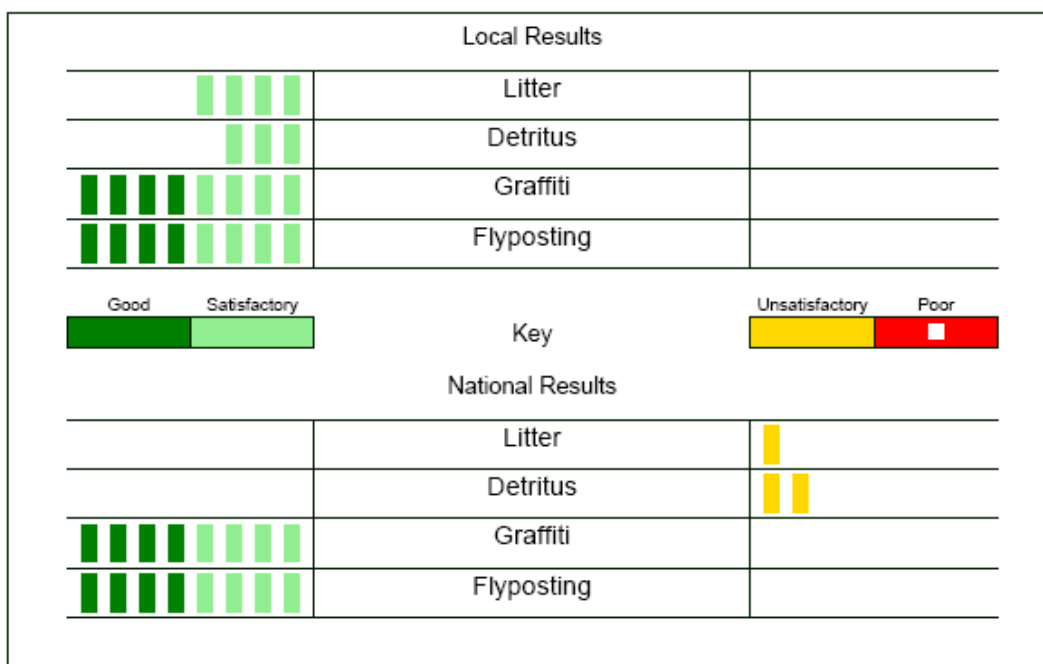
Table 1 shows our LAA targets and past performance, highlighting the improvement made over the last few years in order to work towards our Corporate Objective of creating “*exemplary standards of street cleanliness*”.

Table 1: LEQ LAA targets and Performance to date

	2008/9	2009/10	2010/11
NI195 Target Litter	8%	7.5%	7%
NI195 Actual Litter	7%	7% (1st tranche indicator)	NA
NI195 Target Detritus	10%	9%	8%
NI195 Actual Detritus	9%	9% (1st tranche indicator)	NA
NI195 Target Graffiti	7%	6%	6%
NI195 Actual Graffiti	4%	4% (1st tranche indicator)	NA
NI195 Target Fly-Posting	1%	0.5%	0.5%
NI195 Actual Fly-Posting	0%	0% (1st tranche indicator)	NA

Table 2 shows how Wirral compared to the national average in 08/09 with regards to LEQ standards. This chart shows that nationally overall levels of litter and detritus are considered to be “unsatisfactory” by DEFRA. However, Wirral was at the upper end of “satisfactory” with regards to LEQ for litter and detritus last year. We anticipate that achieving our LAA targets over the next two years will move us to the highest score of “good”. Wirral’s levels of graffiti and fly posting are already considered to be “good”, in line with national standards.

Table 2: LEQ Wirral vs National standards (08/09)



Whilst Wirral are on track to meet its NI195 LAA target, the standard of LEQ varies considerably between land-use categories. The Council’s cleansing contractor use this detailed survey information to target resources more effectively. For example, managing detritus in the “other highways” category has become a focus of one of the Environmental Streetscene Contract’s work streams due to 21% of survey samples failing to meet require standards. The high presence of graffiti in parks and open spaces (22% of survey samples failing) has also been tabled for discussion at the Living and Working Environment Partnership meetings. By focusing on the worst performing land classes, significant improvements can be made to the overall NI195 scores.

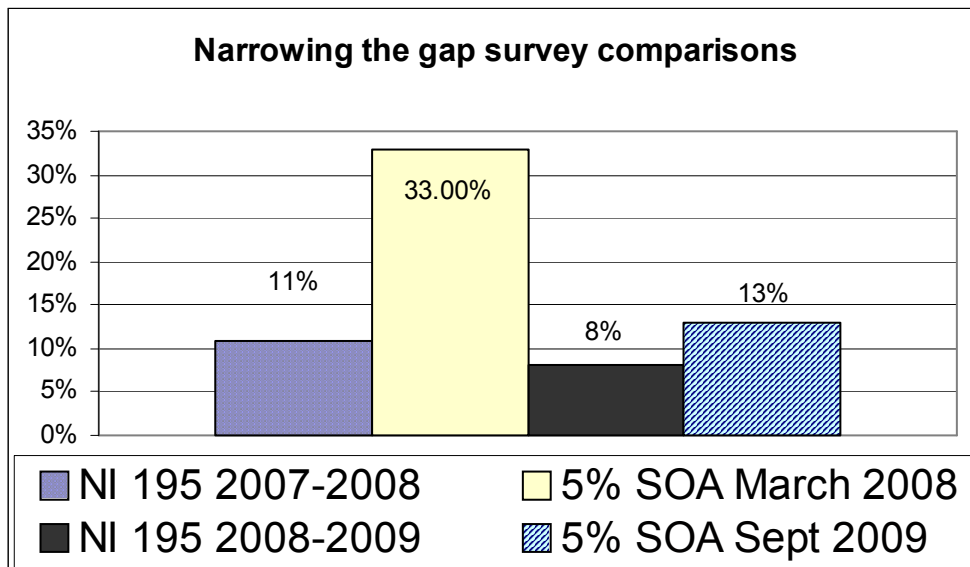
3.2 Narrowing the Gap

Table 3 shows the impact that has been made in reducing of levels of litter and detritus in Wirral’s 5% most deprived areas. In March 2008 the Keep Britain Tidy Group (KBT) carried out an independent survey. They found that 33% of streets and open spaces failed to meet NI195 cleansing standards in deprived areas, compared to 11% of streets failing across the borough as a whole resulting in a 22% gap in litter and detritus levels. KBT returned in September this year to conduct a second survey and found the LEQ gap had been reduced to just 5%. This calculation is based on the combined litter and detritus scores based on the NI195 survey methodology.

It is important to note that the improvement in these areas has **not** been achieved at the expense of cleansing standards elsewhere in Wirral. The most recent NI195 scores, at the end of year 2008/9, show only 8% of Streets failing to meet standards. In comparison this figure stood at 11% at the end of 2007/8.

The KBT survey concludes that only 13% of streets and open spaces in deprived areas have unacceptable levels of litter and detritus, against a 2009/10 target of 24%. The target has therefore been exceeded.

Table 3



4.0 DELIVERY PLAN ACTIONS/PROJECTS

Projects detailed in the LEQ delivery plan are all aimed at helping Wirral to improve environmental quality for residents and are grouped under four main themes:

- Narrow the gap in cleanliness standards between the 5% most deprived areas and the borough as a whole.
- Monitor and respond appropriately to the levels of flytipping across the borough.
- Continue to improve the overall cleanliness of public highways through the Environmental Streetscene Contract and Biffa “partnering” arrangement.
- Work with partners and statutory landowners to identify and deliver borough wide improvements in environmental quality.

4.1 Performance Monitoring

The delivery plan itself is made up of 14 projects that are further broken down into 39 detailed actions (Appendix 1). Each detailed action is then graded as red, amber or green (RAG) in order to identify its status. The current breakdown of the status of each detailed action is as follows:

- Red: 3 (all related to one project)
- Amber: 10
- Green: 26

Therefore, the current status of the 14 projects is:

- Green 7
- Amber / Green: 1
- Amber: 3
- Red: 1
- Completed: 2

4.2 Project Status Update

4.2.1 Green Projects

The following projects are considered to be on track to achieving the objectives. An overview of each project can be found in appendix 2:

- Continue to promote the Tidy Business Campaign within the SOA area and beyond
- Merseyside Improvement & Efficiency Partnership (MIEP) funding to set baseline data for Merseyside surveying of NI195
- Review of cleansing equipment and techniques in order to tackle smoking related litter, paying particular attention to retail areas

- Liveability Mapping exercise
- Launch a smoking litter awareness campaign
- Improve partnership working with other statutory landowners regarding LEQ issues, specifically in Wirral's 5% most deprived areas
- Develop new and enhanced graffiti removal service.

4.2.2 Amber/Green Projects

Empty Property Strategy

As part of Wirral Council's Empty Property Strategy the Empty Property Team have established a scheme called HOUSED (Home Ownership Using Sustainable Empty Dwellings). The scheme enables those wishing to own their home, the opportunity to purchase a property that has been refurbished to extremely high standards at an affordable price

The HOUSED Scheme has delivered the acquisition of 14 houses and the refurbishment of 13 to Decent Homes, Secure By Design and Eco-Homes Standards to date. Phase 4 is currently out to tender and comprises of 1 property.

The Empty Property Team in partnership with Legal Services is piloting the Enforced Sales Procedure targeted at the worst empty properties on the Borough using S101 of the Law of Property Act 1925. The procedure allows the sale of empty properties to recover debts owed to the Council.

The first successful Enforced Sale case has been taken to court and the Council was awarded the "Order of Sale". This long-term empty property has blighted a neighbourhood for over 10 years and has accumulated over £14,000 worth of debt in unpaid Council Tax, plus other Council debt for works in default. The Council recently sold the premises at auction to a local developer who is currently seeking planning permission to refurbish the premises. There are currently 6 more Enforced Sales cases with the Legal Team.

4.2.3 Amber Projects

Develop community environment champions

Since April this year, the post of Community Engagement Officer has been being split between operational contract management and engagement. However, an assistant contract manager is now in post, meaning that from November, the Engagement Officer is now concentrating wholly on working with communities.

This project involves the recruitment of up to 250 individuals to participate in the programme. These individual volunteers will engage with other residents in their area and act as a point of contact for the Waste and Recycling Team (WRT). Initial progress in identifying interested individuals is already underway via 'Big Tidy Up' litter-picks (80 of which have been carried out to date).

Develop and implement citizen charters in 3 pathfinder areas

Beechwood and Ballantyne community charter is currently at print. A community day is being arranged to take place over the Christmas period to officially launch the initiative.

The impact of this charter will be assessed following its release. Other environmental charters will be developed following this assessment.

CRM Springboard Integration with Biffa

Currently only limited IT staffing resource in Wirral has been secured to deliver this project. One staff member is available to carry out the work, and providing they are not re-directed to other IT priorities elsewhere in the Council, the initiative should progress.

On completion of this important project, it is expected that the Streetscene Call Centre staff will be able to communicate with Springboard via CRM to enable access to real time information. Eventually it will form part of the vision of "customer self -service" whereby a customer will be able to log onto Wirral Council, log a call regarding, for example a missed bin, and view the current status.

The Technical Services Customer Access Strategy Team is monitoring this project. A revised project plan has been developed to reflect current IT resource availability. It is expected that this project will make significant progress over the next 5 months, but will need to be continued throughout 2011/12 in order to rollout the integration of all service areas related to the Biffa Contract. Wirral Council IT resources will need to be secured in the Customer Access Strategy Work plan for 2011/12.

4.2.3 Red Projects

Develop Key Stage 2 education pack tackling the issue of litter

This project has been delayed partly due to financial difficulties in identifying a specific budget for this initiative.

It seems probable the situation will be resolved shortly and the project will be implemented in 2011/12.

4.2.4 Completed Projects

The projects listed in this section are complete but will stay on the plan as a record. More information about these projects can be found in Appendix.

- Review use of HMRI Wardens to enhance partnership working
- Dog Fouling initiatives

4.2.5 On street Recycling: (*Intrinsically linked to LEQ- being monitored through the Waste and Recycling LAA delivery plan.*)

In April 2009, an on-street recycling trial was rolled out to the four areas of Bromborough, Heswall, Birkenhead and Liscard. A total of 22 double litter and recycling bins were installed in the main shopping areas, allowing residents and visitors to recycle newspapers, magazines, drinks cans, plastic drinks bottles and glass drinks bottles on the go. The bins were purchased using funding from the European Metal Recycling (EMR) Reload Fund.

Since their introduction, residents have used these bins to recycle 3.32 tonnes of paper, cans, glass and plastic bottles. Participation has been particularly high in Birkenhead and Liscard town centres.

Contamination has been quite low in Bromborough and Heswall, consisting mainly of liquids and plastic food containers. Birkenhead and Liscard, with their much higher footfall, have had a higher percentage of contamination, though has also been mainly liquid with some food containers and drink cups. We intend to reduce contamination by improving the signage on the bins.

Due to the success of the on-street recycling trial, I recommend expanding the coverage of these receptacles to other areas of the Borough including West Kirby, Hoylake, New Brighton, Oxton and Moreton (approximately 30 receptacles). Waste Capital Infrastructure Grant (WCIG) has been already allocated to purchase these receptacles for the initial trial (Cabinet, 3 April 2008, Minute 577) but was unused due to the funding we secured through EMR. A number of on-street recycling bins have also been requested through the You Decide process this year.

Biffa will service the bins as part of the existing contract at no extra cost to the Council. In return, I propose a number of glass recycling banks be removed that are no longer required by residents as they are able to recycle glass in their grey bins. Notices will be placed on the banks scheduled for removal to inform residents and to advise of the location of alternative banks. The dome shaped glass banks provided by Berrymans will continue to be available for residents to use. The on-street recycling bins will help keep the areas tidy through increased litter bin provision, divert even more recyclable material from landfill and raise the profile of recycling to residents, workers and visitors.

6.0 SUMMARY

- 6.1 Overall, the actions contained within the delivery plan are very effective with regards to improving environmental quality for Wirral residents and contribute to the achievement of our LAA and our "Narrowing the Gap" local target. The overall LEQ standards in Wirral are higher than the national average. The Living and Working Environment Partnership will continue to develop joint initiatives with LAA partners aiming to further improve environmental quality in the most efficient way, especially in the poorest

performing land use categories. Much of the significant improvements made to cleanliness standards in Wirral's most deprived areas can be attributed to the increased community engagement initiatives being delivered by Neighbourhood Management Teams and the work of the Technical Services engagement staff. As the Living and Working Environment Partnership develops it will prioritise work with communities in order to develop a sustainable mechanism for continuing to improve LEQ standards for the people of Wirral and its visitors.

7.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 There are no revenue implications arising from this report.

8.0 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

8.1 There are no specific implications under this heading.

9.0 PLANNING IMPLICATIONS

9.1 There are no specific implications under this heading.

10.0 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

10.1 There are no community safety implications arising from this report.

11.0 HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLICATIONS

11.1 There are no specific implications under this heading.

12.0 LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS

12.1 All activities detailed in this report supported the principals of the LA 21 Agenda, contributing positively to Wirral's Nottingham Declaration and Sustainability plans.

13.0 SOCIAL INCLUSION IMPLICATIONS

13.1 There are no specific implications under this heading.

14.0 ANTI-POVERTY IMPLICATIONS

14.1 There are no specific implications under this heading.

15.0 ACCESS TO INFORMATION ACT

15.1 There are no specific implications under this heading.

16.0 LOCAL MEMBER SUPPORT IMPLICATIONS

16.1 There are no specific implications under this heading.

17.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 17.1 Members are requested to note of the progress made in the LEQ 2009/10 delivery plan and endorse the proposed expansion of the on-street recycling receptacles detailed in section 4.2.5.

DAVID GREEN
DIRECTOR, TECHNICAL SERVICES

APPENDIX 2: Green Status Projects

2a. Continue to promote the Tidy Business Campaign within the SOA area and beyond

To date, 61 tidy businesses have been recognised via the scheme. An innovative project (based in Oxton Village) aims to raise the profile of the scheme by creating Britain's first 'Tidy Business Village'. The launch of this project will coincide with the turning on of the Oxton Christmas lights on Saturday 5th December.

Three representatives from the WRT were recently invited by KBT to Birmingham to share Wirral's approach with other local authorities throughout England and Wales. The WRT will be submitting an award application for KBT's next round of annual awards, under the category: "Keep Britain Tidy Business Awards Initiative".

2b. Merseyside Improvement & Efficiency Partnership (MIEP) funding to set baseline data for Merseyside surveying of NI195

Following the allocation of funding from the MIEP a NI195 base lining exercise is due to commence in November 2009. This exercise will involve survey shadowing from KBT. The results of this shadowed tranche of NI195 surveying will help to compare scores throughout Merseyside. A subsequent exercise will then be carried out to attempt to establish and share best practice between the various local authorities involved. This may identify areas in which efficiencies can be made at a regional level.

2c. Review of cleansing equipment and techniques in order to tackle smoking related litter, paying particular attention to retail areas

This year has seen the introduction of hand held blower /vacuum petrol driven machines as a method of dealing with smoking related litter. It has been agreed that the crews will employ the machines in the Primary and Secondary Retail areas for the period up to and including the N195 survey in November 2009. The performance achieved will be measured and a decision made as to whether using the machines has a positive effect on the standard of cleanse and if these particular machines are the best for the job. Technical Services are also working with Biffa and manufacturers to modify the equipment design to make them user-friendly, so they may be used for longer periods of time.

2d. Liveability Mapping exercise

This project aims to review fly tipping, graffiti and street cleansing data and produce maps to highlight the hotspot areas. Data for the first two quarters is currently being collated and utilised to produce two sets of maps identifying such locations for 2009/10 so far.

Following the production of these maps a number of community driven projects will be set up in an attempt to tackle the issues in highlighted problem

locations. Particular attention will be paid to areas located within the 32 most deprived super output areas.

2e. Launch a smoking litter awareness campaign

A smoking related litter (SRL) awareness campaign is being developed in conjunction with Tranmere Rovers. Over 5000 'Stubbi' portable ashtrays have been purchased to distribute in and around Prenton Park on match days throughout the 2009/10 season. The portable ashtrays support the Wirral Council and Tranmere Rovers logos, the idea being that the branding will enhance the message and encourage their consequent usage. This campaign will be run in conjunction with various partners including KBT, the Environment Agency and youth football teams throughout Wirral.

2f. Improve partnership working with other statutory landowners regarding LEQ issues, specifically in Wirral's 5% most deprived areas

Work is ongoing with the Merseyside Cleaner Safer Greener Partnership (MCSG) to further develop relationships with statutory landowners including Mersey Travel and Virgin Media. It is envisaged that environmental partnership arrangements will be set up with both these statutory undertakers covering the whole of Merseyside.

A partnership working arrangement has already been established with Scottish Power Manweb regards removal of graffiti from their substations throughout Wirral (see 3.12).

2g. Develop new and enhanced graffiti removal service

Wirral's 'Graffiti Busters' team are now operational throughout the borough. They are currently removing all graffiti from both public and private property in line with the most recent changes to policy.

The approach to graffiti in Wirral is not simply concerned with its removal. The Graffiti Steering Group (GSG) comprises of representatives from various departments of Wirral Council and a number of strategic partners. It looks at ways in which prevention can be enhanced and also feeds offenders into the restorative justice system. A number of successful prosecutions have already taken place during the 2009/10 year so far.

The GSG has already secured funding from Scottish Power Manweb and a number of key RSLs in Wirral. This funding should secure the future and expansion of the service. Future proposed partnering arrangements include Virgin Media and Mersey Travel.

APPENDIX 3: COMPLETE PROJECT UPDATES

3a. Review use of HMRI Wardens to enhance partnership working

The WRT will continue to work in partnership with Wirral's Warden service following their recent review. A member of the Environmental Wardens team has been seconded to the WRT since August 08 with great success.

3b. Dog Fouling initiatives

Members previously considered a series of reports during 2006 – 2008. These reports outlined dog fouling enforcement issues, presenting a range of potential initiatives to combat dog fouling for Members consideration, and reporting on both the Councils previous 'Wirral Dogwatch' campaign and the Councils new 'Don't give a dog a bad name' campaign that was launched in 2008. Council further allocated an additional £40,000 in the 2008/2009 budget to maintain the campaign and in particular to tackle dog fouling in coastal areas and country parks

In response to the above, the 2009 'Don't give a dog a bad name' campaign targeted Wirral's coastal waterfront areas and parks in a rolling programme of highly visual face-to-face engagement with dog walkers.