

APPENDIX 3

PUBLIC SPACES PROTECTION ORDER – DOG CONTROL PUBLIC CONSULTATION SUMMARY REPORT DECEMBER 2018

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1** The Council is committed to creating a high quality user experience of Wirral's open space environment as part of the pledge to create an attractive local environment for Wirral residents. Wirral is widely regarded as one of the best places in the country to own and exercise dogs. The Council recognises that the vast majority of dog owners in Wirral are highly responsible, cherishing their pets but also being very aware of their impact on others and the environment. However it is recognised that over time irresponsible dog ownership in Wirral has adversely affected people's enjoyment of the environment, including dog owners and their pets.
- 1.2** In response to this the Council and partners worked together to develop proposals for a range of dog control measures to address the level of dog related incidents and make the open space environment safer.
- 1.3** A full public consultation and stakeholder engagement exercise was carried out, to seek views on the proposed dog control measures.
- 1.4** This report presents a summary of the feedback from the consultation exercise about the proposed dog control measures.

2.0 BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES

- 2.1** The Council's 'Loving our Environment' Strategy was approved in December 2015, to encourage residents to take pride in their local community and increase personal responsibility, to keep Wirral 'clean and green'. This includes measures to drive behaviour change, including education and a zero tolerance approach to littering and not picking up dog fouling.
- 2.2** The Council carried out a resident Insight survey in 2015 and again in 2017 and dog fouling continues to rate highly as a priority with residents, with 56% considering it to be a problem in their area in 2015, rising to 62% in the 2017 survey.
- 2.3** The Council and its partners investigated the level of incidents that have occurred as a result of irresponsible dog ownership, preparing an evidence base setting out the scale of dog incidents and issues and their impact on Wirral residents and visitors. As a result of this, the Council developed proposals for a range of dog control measures, to address the level of dog related incidents and make the open space environment safer.

2.4 The consultation exercise took place from 4th June to the 15th July 2018. The exercise consisted of an online survey and an easy read version that was distributed extensively for residents to complete. The exercise resulted in 8975 individual responses to the survey, together with a series of submitted letters, emails and petitions.

3.0 CONSULTATION METHODOLOGY

3.1 The consultation contained a number of options that the Council was proposing to introduce, with opportunity to comment or propose other locations that had not been listed:

1. All people walking a dog would have to carry a supply of bags. If people don't pick up after their dog and they have no bags they will be fined £100.
2. Anyone seen walking more than 6 dogs would be given a fine of £100.
3. Areas where dogs would not be permitted:
 - Children's playgrounds (all year round)
 - Marked sports pitches (during the playing season)
 - Tennis Courts and Bowling Greens (all year)
 - Dog free zones on 4 bathing beaches – West Kirby, Meols, Moreton and Wallasey and New Brighton, which is a popular beach with visitors (between May and September).
 - Within fenced areas around Birkenhead Park lakes, to protect wildlife.
4. Areas where dogs must be kept on leads:
 - Picnic areas.
 - Pavements next to A and B roads.
 - Public car parks.
 - Cemeteries and crematoria.
 - Communal areas within allotment sites.
5. Put dogs on a lead by instruction.
6. Increasing the level of dog fouling FPN fine from £50 to £100, to bring it in line with the FPN for littering.

3.2 The consultation was made available online via an external platform and was also delivered in easy read paper format to libraries, one stop shops, constituency contacts, Wired, Mencap, Wirral Evolutions and on request for those unable to use computer. Returned paper surveys were inputted manually into the online consultation.

3.3 A detailed set of frequently asked questions (FAQ) were posted online, along with maps showing the proposed beach locations and the proposed areas in Birkenhead Park. The FAQs included information on:

- Why is a public spaces protection order for the control of dogs required;
- How would these rules be enforced; would the dog controls apply to assistance dogs;
- Would the rules apply 24/7;
- Could I report anyone I see breaking the PSPO;
- Where can dog poo be disposed of;
- Rather than carrying dog poo around with me during my walk, can I leave bags to pick up on my return;

- Would you have powers to stop and search me for a bag;
- What if I ran out of bags;
- Would dogs be allowed on beaches;
- Could I still walk to Hilbre Island;
- Could I walk my dog around the marine lake in West Kirby;
- Would dogs be allowed in parks including country parks;
- Would dogs be allowed in children's play areas;
- Could I take my dog with my child to the park;
- Could I take my dog to watch my child play football;
- Would dogs be allowed on sports pitches;
- Would dogs be allowed on golf courses;
- Would dogs be allowed on bowling greens and tennis courts;
- Could I leave my dog tied up to the railings/fence/post if I go into a dog free zone without them;
- What is classed as a dog lead;
- Would dogs have to be kept on leads all the time;
- Would dogs need to be kept on a lead at the park;
- Would dogs be allowed in cemeteries;
- Could my dog run free off the lead to get exercise;
- What areas could I be asked to put my dog on a lead;
- Why would I be asked to put my dog on a lead if I was in an area where they didn't have to be?

- 3.4** The Council has built up an extensive database of email addresses from residents, partners and other stakeholders who have opted to provide their details to receive information about Council services and consultations. This database received an email about the proposed dog control PSPO and consultation process.
- 3.5** Posters and cards were distributed through Constituency contacts, advertising the consultation.
- 3.6** The Council's website was also used extensively throughout the consultation, with a home page presence promoting the consultation and providing access to it. The consultation was highlighted on the Council's internal intranet page for Council employees. The Council's various social networking profiles (Facebook and Twitter) were also used to promote the consultation and throughout to dispel any myths.
- 3.7** Adverts were placed in the local media and the Cabinet Member for the Environment was invited to talk on local radio about the proposals.
- 3.8** The consultation ran from Monday 4th June 2018 until Sunday 15th July 2018.
- 3.9** An external company, Hitch Marketing Ltd., was commissioned to engage with members of the public at six locations (the beaches with proposed restrictions and Birkenhead Park) to encourage them to take part in the survey. From the

4th June to the 15th July, they carried out 18 x 3-hour shifts split across the locations and following timeslots: 9am - 12pm, 1pm - 4pm and 5pm - 8pm.

- 3.10** In addition to the consultation, approx. 200 emails and letters were received, mostly following a template produced by an online campaign.

4.0 PETITIONS RECEIVED

- 4.1** One petition related to the proposed dog control public space protection order has been received):

‘Stop the proposed PSPO being enforced across the Wirral’ – 15,286 signatures (as of 19th September 2018)

- 4.2** The numbers of signatures quoted are correct at the time of writing this report.

- 4.3** The ‘Stop the proposed PSPO being enforced across the Wirral’ Petition received over 3,000 signatures and as per the Council’s petition scheme, it is therefore eligible to be heard by Council.

5.0 ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

- 5.1** The Council used online software to capture all responses and provide analysis of the quantitative aspect of the consultation questions. Responses which are completed online go directly into the system and any easy read paper survey responses received are manually inputted into the same system, using clear protocols.

- 5.2** All responses to the individual questions posed were analysed regardless of whether questionnaires were fully or partially completed.

- 5.3** The comments sections have been reviewed and analysed by the project team to identify common themes and suggestions. All of these comments are also available in full online at the Council website at:
<https://www.wirral.gov.uk/environmental-problems/dog-control-orders>.

- 5.5** 8975 responses were received.

- 5.6** 73% of respondents are dog owners.

- 5.7** **Response to Question 1** (All people walking a dog would have to carry a supply of bags. If people don’t pick up after their dog and they have no bags they will be fined £100).

5.7.1 Table to show responses:

To what extent do you agree or disagree with this proposal?		
Answer Choices	Responses	
Strongly agree	39.29%	3454
Agree	25.71%	2260
Neither agree nor disagree	6.23%	548
Disagree	11.61%	1021
Strongly disagree	17.15%	1508
Any additional comments:		3751
	Answered	8791
	Skipped	184

5.7.2 Summary of themes from comments:

- The proposed fine is not enough.
- The proposed fine is too much.
- Only effective if it's going to be enforced.
- Some respondents thought that this was a “stop and search”, rather than an additional check when someone didn't pick up after their dog in the first place, and commented that this would be unfair.
- Dog owners should be prepared to clean up after their pets.
- Unforeseen circumstances can leave you with no bags.

5.8 Response to Question 2 (Anyone seen walking more than 6 dogs would be given a fine of £100)

5.8.1 Table to show responses:

To what extent do you agree or disagree with this proposal?		
Answer Choices	Responses	
Strongly agree	31.29%	2699
Agree	21.80%	1880
Neither agree nor disagree	15.17%	1308
Disagree	15.14%	1306
Strongly disagree	16.60%	1432
	Answered	8625
	Skipped	350

5.8.2 When asked “Have you experienced an individual walking a large number of dogs, on or off the lead that has caused you, your family or your dog concern in Wirral?”

Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	20.19%	1740
No	78.67%	6779
Don't know	1.14%	98
	Answered	8617
	Skipped	358

5.9 Response to Question 3 (Would you like to see the introduction of a new rule to prevent dogs from entering the following areas?)

5.9.1 Table to show results of areas proposed preventing dogs from entering:

Specified Area	Yes	No	Don't know
Children's playgrounds (all year)	80%	16%	3%
Marked and fenced sports pitches (during defined playing seasons)	61%	33%	6%
ennis courts and bowling greens (all year round)	75%	20%	5%
Dog free zone on West Kirby beach (between 1 May to 30 September each year)	26%	72%	3%
Dog free zone on Meols beach (between 1 May to 30 September each year)	23%	73%	3%
Dog free zone on Moreton beach (Leasowe Bay) (between 1 May to 30 September each year)	22%	74%	3%
Dog free zone on Wallasey beach (between 1 May to 30 September each year)	23%	74%	3%
Dog free zone on New Brighton beach (between 1 May to 30 September each year)	26%	72%	3%
Fenced areas around the lakes in Birkenhead Park	43%	47%	10%

5.10 Response to Question 4 (Would you like to see the introduction of a new rule requiring dogs to be kept on a lead within the following locations?)

5.10.1 Table to show results of areas proposed where dogs must be on a lead:

	Yes	No	Don't know
Designated picnic areas	65%	31%	4%
A and B classed public roads and highways	72%	23%	5%
Public car parks	69%	27%	5%
The grounds of cemeteries and crematoria	77%	19%	4%
Communal areas within the grounds of allotment sites	54%	32%	14%

5.10.2 Respondents were also asked for suggestions of any other locations where they felt that there should be a requirement for dogs to be on a lead.

Suggestions include:

- All public parks
- Bidston Hill
- Wirral Way
- Open farm areas
- Outside schools
- Shopping centres
- Dee Estuary - bird and toad breeding areas

- Arno - rose garden
- New Brighton prom
- Paths shared with cyclists
- West Kirby prom
- Storeton Quarry
- Bridle ways and some byways
- Eastham (Carlett Park) woods and public grasslands areas
- Anywhere that children play

5.11 Response to Question 5 (Put dogs on a lead by instruction)

5.11.1 Table to show responses:

To what extent do you agree or disagree with this proposal?		
Answer Choices	Responses	
Strongly agree	48.59%	3855
Agree	32.06%	2544
Neither agree nor disagree	6.87%	545
Disagree	5.00%	397
Strongly disagree	7.47%	593
	Answered	7934
	Skipped	1041

5.11.2 When asked “Have you ever experienced a dog acting aggressively towards you, your family or your dog in Wirral?”

Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	42.25%	3351
No	57.75%	4580
	Answered	7931
	Skipped	1044

5.12 Response to Question 6 (To what extent do you agree with the Council with raising the fine to be equal to that of a litter fine?)

5.12.1 Table to show responses:

To what extent do you agree with the Council with raising the fine to be equal to that of a litter fine?		
Answer Choices	Responses	
Strongly agree	55.48%	4379
Agree	26.26%	2073
Neither agree nor disagree	6.64%	524
Disagree	5.46%	431
Strongly disagree	6.16%	486
Any additional comments:		2388
	Answered	7893
	Skipped	1082

5.12.2 Summary of themes from comments:

- £100 too high – should be £25
- £100 too low – should be £250
- Dog fouling would need to be enforced
- More litter bins required
- Should be the same as for litter
- Signs to make visitors aware of rules and enforcement
- The Council should supply bags

5.13 Letters and emails received

5.13.1 Over 200 letters and emails were received by Councillors and the Council. These raised a number of concerns and comments, which are summarised below:

- Dogs and walking are good for mental health – will the restrictions cause a negative impact on those people who are not able to get to alternative locations to let their dog off lead?
- Dog walking also helps prevent social isolation – will restrictions lead to more people becoming isolated?
- Residents who don't drive – what if they live near a park with a total restriction?
- No list of alternative open areas where dogs can exercise in relation to the banned areas, specifically the sports pitches.
- The proposed measures will negatively impact on tourism.
- Why is the Council not targeting the litter – especially the litter left by sports teams using the pitches?
- Dog walkers often also collect litter.
- Health and wellbeing of dogs if they are not allowed to run and play off lead.
- 6 dogs is far too many - 2 or 3 max in parks and residential areas.
- Need to make sure that enforcement actually happens, otherwise people will just ignore the PSPOs.
- The proposed measures will target responsible dog owners.
- Weekend / bank holiday restrictions only on the beaches.
- Locations of beach bans not used by general public – generally just dog walkers; they will become no go areas.
- Suggest some restrictions are introduced at West Kirby and New Brighton beaches, but no restrictions at the other beaches.
- Dogs on leads on beaches?
- Kingdom security targeting vulnerable people.

5.13.2 All written responses and submissions have been produced and made available for Cabinet to scrutinise.

6. CONCLUSION

- 6.1** There is strong support for most of the proposed measures such as raising the fine in line with litter (to £100), ensuring means of disposal, instruction for a dog to be placed on a lead if causing nuisance or distress and keeping children safe by not permitting dogs to enter enclosed play and sports areas.
- 6.2** The consultation exercise has shown that there are proposals that have little support, such as the ban on five sections of Wirral's beaches and these will not be taken forward at this time.
- 6.3** The overall nature of the comments demonstrates that common sense measures are acceptable and indeed welcome to ensure that all can enjoy Wirral's outdoors. However, the Council should ensure that suitable alternatives are highlighted if the proposed restrictions result in significant areas where dogs would not be permitted to run free; and more needs to be done to help prevent litter as well as dog fouling.

Reporting Officer: Claire Brandwood
Team Leader (Waste Prevention)
Telephone: 0151 606 2170
Email: clairebrandwood@wirral.gov.uk