



## ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE EMERGENCY AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 20 October 2021

REPORT TITLE:	LOVE WIRRAL STRATEGY
REPORT OF:	DIRECTOR OF NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

### REPORT SUMMARY

This report provides Committee with recommendations for the Council's Love Wirral Strategy (attached as Appendix 1), which sets out the Council's approach to further develop on the successes of the Loving our Environment strategy, engaging with Wirral's communities and visitors to protect, respect and enjoy Wirral's parks, beaches, towns and local areas.

The Love Wirral Strategy will focus on set stages to tackle areas where littering, dog fouling, trade waste and graffiti and fly posting are prevalent to bring about positive behaviour change:

1. **Intelligence-led decision making** – gathering information to highlight hot spot locations and experiences from local residents.
2. **Enabling** – audit of existing infrastructure (e.g. bins and dog fouling bag dispensers), to make sure that there is sufficient and fit-for-purpose litter bin provision, that is in the right place.
3. **Education** – communication campaigns, signage, floor stencils.
4. **Engagement** – face-to-face engagement (following Covid-safe procedures and practices) with people at hot spot locations, local schools and businesses.
5. **Enforcement** – the Council employs an in-house enforcement service. Enforcement will be the final step, following the above stages.

This matter affects all Wards within the Borough. It is a key decision.

### RECOMMENDATION/S

The Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee are requested to:

1. Approve the Love Wirral Strategy.
2. Receive regular progress updates on the delivery of the strategy.

## **SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

### **1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S**

- 1.1 Wirral Council spends around £4million per year picking up litter, sweeping the streets and clearing fly tipping.
- 1.2 Since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions at the end of March 2020, Wirral has seen a 50% increase in street cleansing waste collected. Online reports of dog fouling have also increased by 23%. Visitor numbers have increased at our coastal locations and parks, as people have been spending more time closer to home.
- 1.3 The Love Wirral Strategy is intended to align our approach with the national Litter Strategy and recent Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) guidance on “binrastructure”, whilst taking into account the changing needs of our area. Focusing on a stepped approach of infrastructure, education, engagement and proportional enforcement will deliver the desired behaviour change for residents and visitors to protect, respect and enjoy the beautiful environment that Wirral has to offer for current and future generations.

### **2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 2.1 The Council has previously used different approaches to tackling environmental crime, employing a robust zero tolerance application of enforcement. A private contractor, Kingdom, was employed to carry out the enforcement on the Council's behalf. Following a number of difficulties and challenges with this approach, the Council decided to terminate the contract with Kingdom and to move away from zero tolerance. The Council's Enforcement Policy was subsequently amended to remove zero tolerance and adopt a more discretionary approach to environmental crime, based on education and advice, but also retaining the opportunity to carry out enforcement. Therefore, the Love Wirral Strategy has been developed to follow the discretionary approach to environmental crime, as set out in the Council's Enforcement Policy.

### **3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

The Loving our Environment Strategy 2015 helped to deliver positive environmental behaviour, with the introduction of 20 Love Where You Live Hubs across the borough (for rental of litter picking equipment), engagement with schools and businesses and a zero-tolerance approach to littering and dog fouling. Enforcement ceased in March 2019, but engagement and support in local communities continued. Volunteer litter picking increased significantly and since March 2020, approximately 600 litter picking kits have been donated to individuals, groups, schools and charities.

### 3.1 Litter

Wirral Council spends around £4m per year picking up litter, sweeping the streets and clearing fly tipping.

3.2 From April 2020 (just after the start of the first national lockdown due to Covid-19), the tonnage of collected street cleansing has increased by an average of 50%, compared with collected tonnages in 2019. Between April 2020 and March 2021, this equated to an additional 3,000 tonnes of street cleansing and litter. This is likely due to the stay-at-home order and people only being permitted to take limited, local outdoor exercise.

3.3 The Council normally schedules additional resources for coastal locations over the Summer months, when there would traditionally be a higher footfall at these locations. Due to the increased visitor numbers to these locations due to travel restrictions, an additional £193k of resources was provided from Covid-19 funding to cover the period of 1 June to 25 October 2020, including:

- 29 extra bulk bins (1100ltr) placed at strategic locations around the borough, e.g. The Dips, New Brighton. This increased usual provision by 118% from June to August, compared to the same period in 2019.
- Additional street cleansing permanent presence, with extended hours of operation, at Wirral's main coastal destinations.
- Additional prom crew to empty litter bins.

3.4 In Summer 2020, a total of 51 tonnes was collected from the bulk bins at coastal and parks locations and an additional 409 tonnes of litter was collected over the weekends from the prom and other coastal locations compared to the summer period in 2019 (a 26% increase).

3.5 Additional resources, above what would normally be deployed pre-Covid, has also been arranged for Spring/Summer 2021 and is currently scheduled until end September 2021.

3.6 According to the National Litter Survey, carried out by Keep Britain Tidy in 2017/18, The most commonly littered item is cigarette butts, found on 79% of sites. The following three most littered items, all 'food and drink on the go' related, are confectionery packs (found on 60% of sites), soft drink bottles and cans (52%) and fast food related litter (33%). Since this survey and as a direct result of the Covid-19 pandemic, there has been a new litter type observed – Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), e.g. face masks and disposable gloves.

3.7 The Council suspended the loan of litter picking equipment, due to the health risks of Covid-19 transmissions and also closure of Council venues. However, the Council has supplied over 600 litter picking kits (litter picker, bag hoop and high viz vest) this year, to local groups, schools and individuals carrying out litter picks in their local area. In addition, the Council has recently received requests from locations seeking to be a Love Where You Live Hub and requests from schools for kits that can be used by students and their families. Litter picking volunteers have been invaluable to the maintenance of local areas, with local groups such as The New Brighteners and The Wirral Wombles collecting over 24 tonnes of litter so far this year.

3.8 All collected litter and street cleansing is sent with Wirral’s household waste to the energy from waste facility in Teesside, where it is burned to generate heat and electricity. None of the litter is separated for recycling, due to high levels of contamination (non-recyclable materials, food and liquids) when a trial was undertaken a few years ago. It is likely that England will approve a Deposit Return Scheme for drinks bottles and cans as part of the Environment Bill, which is currently going through Parliament. If rolled out, this will likely result in a reduction of these materials being littered.

### 3.9 Dog Fouling

The Residents Survey of 2017 carried out by Ipsos Mori on behalf of the Council found that dog fouling was a major concern among residents. The Residents Survey analysis report said: “We know that the appearance of the borough is very important to Wirral residents. Area cleanliness is a key driver to local area satisfaction and also of the Council representing value for money, so it is important to understand what shapes perceptions of litter issues. Dog fouling comes out as the top issue across the board, with all constituencies bar Wirral West naming it as the top issue in their area.” Ipsos Mori, 2017.

Table 1 – Percentage of residents listing Dog Fouling as their top issue of concern

Constituency Area	People siting Dog Fouling as a problem in their local area	People siting Dog Fouling as a problem in the Borough
Wallasey	69%	61%
Birkenhead	67%	67%
Wirral West	57%	56%
Wirral South	50%	52%

3.10 The Wirral Plan 2025 sets out the Council’s vision to secure the best possible future for our residents and states that we will work for a sustainable environment and safe and pleasant communities (amongst other priorities).

3.11 In 2018, 10 dog poo bag dispensing boards were provided by Tikspac (now Eco Green Communities) and were installed at key locations around the borough. The boards were sponsored by local businesses, Biffa Services Ltd and the Council and have been maintained and refilled through successful collaboration with local residents, volunteers and Council colleagues. Over the two years that they have been in use, 127,500 bags have been used by dog walkers in need. The bags are 100% biodegradable and fully compostable, thus supporting the Council’s single use plastic free policy.

3.12 Dog fouling continues to prompt hundreds of complaints from residents every year, either direct to the Council, on social media, through the local press or through Member surgeries and community outreach work. Residents can log a dog fouling hot spot online. Between April and December 2020, the number of online reports of dog fouling increased by 23%, compared to the same time period in 2019.

### 3.13 How We Will Work to Reduce the Problem

The Council will follow the below set stages to reduce litter, dog fouling and other environmental concerns and will focus on education and engagement primarily. Enforcement will be used where these methods have failed. The implementation of one specific stage may be enough to resolve the issue at one location whereas another location may need to try several stages in a gradual approach to reduce the issue.

### 3.14 Intelligence-led decision making

It is important to identify “hot spot” locations, to effectively target communications and engagement campaigns. Instances of dog fouling can be logged on the Council’s website ([https://my.wirral.gov.uk/service/Dog\\_fouling\\_problem\\_report](https://my.wirral.gov.uk/service/Dog_fouling_problem_report)) and this data will be used to identify locations where dog fouling is recorded as being a problem.

### 3.15 Enabling

At identified locations where levels of litter and/or dog fouling are high, we will carry out an audit of existing infrastructure - how many bins are there in the location, are they in the right locations, are they fit for purpose, clean and in good repair, are they emptied frequently, are they in the right location (start/end of a walk) etc. In addition, to help responsible dog walkers who may have run out of bags, we will continue to support the current provision of 10 Eco Green Communities (EGC) dog poo bag stations and will invest in an additional 10 stations for identified hot spot locations.

3.16 The Council will continue to support litter picking volunteers, through advice, providing kit and continuing the partnership working with our contractor, Biffa Waste Ltd, to pick up bags of collected litter.

### 3.17 Education

We will develop a social media campaign, to highlight responsible dog ownership and what people can do to “do the right thing” and protect, respect and enjoy Wirral. In identified hot spot locations, we will install site-specific signage, reminding dog walkers that they should clean up after their dogs and put the waste into a bin – any bin will do. Location of bins will be highlighted. Where the surface is acceptable, painted stencils will be applied to footpaths, for example in the photograph below, which shows painted green footprints leading to the nearest litter bin:



- 3.18 A communication campaign will be developed to:
- Encourage use of litter bins.
  - Encourage reusable products e.g. masks, cups, water bottles.
  - Highlight reporting of hotspot locations to help assess infrastructure and engagement opportunities.
  - Encourage responsible dog ownership.

### 3.19 **Engagement**

Where the above methods are not resulting in a reduction of dog fouling, an engagement campaign will be developed. Face-to-face engagement will be carried out in a Covid-safe manner. Engagement will centre around speaking with people in hot spot locations, for example dog walkers, signposting to infrastructure available (bins and EGC stations) and offering help where required in the form of additional supplies of dog poo bags.

### 3.20 **Enforcement**

Where education and infrastructure are in place and dog fouling is still occurring, this will be being perpetrated by a few irresponsible dog owners. In these locations, Wirral Council will seek to carry out enforcement action, in line with the Council's Enforcement Policy.

## 4.0 **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 Communication, education and engagement will be carried out using existing resources.
- 4.2 The Love Wirral Strategy will contribute to the 2021/22 budget annual saving target of £75,000, to be achieved from 'Income generated from establishing targeted and discretionary environmental enforcement'. This savings target will not be achieved this year due to late implementation and the requirement to carry out education and engagement first but will be mitigated from other savings achieved.
- 4.3 It should be noted that increased levels of litter generate additional collection and disposal costs, which are likely to cause a pressure in future years if it continues.

## 5.0 **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 The Council has a duty of care under Section 89(1) and (2) of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, to keep specified land clear of litter and refuse, and to keep public highways for which they are responsible clean.
- 5.2 The Council is granted powers to issue Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs) and carry out prosecution for the dropping of litter and trade waste enforcement, in accordance with the Environmental Protection Act 1990. It also has powers to issue FPNs in relation to fly posting and graffiti under the Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003 with part 4 s28 Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005.

## **6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS**

- 6.1 The implementation of the Love Wirral Strategy will be managed by existing staff from within the Waste and Environmental Services Team, in partnership with colleagues from Communications, Community Safety and Parks and Environment.
- 6.2 Staff will receive the necessary training and support to enable them to engage with all members of the community effectively.

## **7.0 RELEVANT RISKS**

- 7.1 There is a risk of reputational damage to the Council if there are high levels of litter and dog fouling. To ensure that people want to live and visit Wirral, it is important to encourage environmental stewardship and care of the environment. Residents and visitors will be actively encouraged to use litter bins, clean up after their dogs and hold on to their litter until they can either get to a bin, or arrive back at their home.

## **8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION**

- 8.1 The Council currently uses a reporting tool to gather information on litter and dog fouling hot spot locations. However, a communications campaign will encourage a greater use of this facility, to engage with local residents, visitors and dog owners regarding litter and dog fouling, litter bin provision and locations, emptying frequency and provision of dog poo bags and litter picking equipment.

## **9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 Wirral Council has a legal requirement to make sure its policies, and the way it carries out its work, do not discriminate against anyone. An Equality Impact Assessment is a tool to help council services identify steps they can take to ensure equality for anyone who might be affected by a particular policy, decision or activity.
- 9.2 The Equality Impact Assessment is available via this link:  
<https://www.wirral.gov.uk/communities-and-neighbourhoods/equality-impact-assessments>

## **10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS**

- 10.1 The Love Wirral Strategy will reduce litter and other environmental crime, improving the local environmental quality for all. Reducing levels of waste is a key aspect of the Council's Environment & Climate Emergency Policy, therefore public education campaigns about waste minimisation and personal responsibility will be developed.
- 10.2 All collected litter and street cleansing is sent with Wirral's household waste to the energy from waste facility in Teesside, where it is burned to generate heat and electricity. There is currently no scope to separate recyclable materials from collected litter, due to high levels of contamination. However, it is likely that England

will approve a Deposit Return Scheme for drinks bottles and cans as part of the Environment Bill, which is currently going through Parliament. If rolled out, this will likely result in a reduction of these materials being littered and an increase in recycling of on-the-go drinks packaging.

## **11. COMMUNITY WEALTH BUILDING**

- 11.1 The Love Wirral Strategy will continue to empower residents, schools and groups to do more in their local community, providing equipment and support to keep their area clean and tidy.
- 11.2 The Love Wirral Strategy outcomes include protecting the environment, minimising waste and using resources efficiently.

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## **APPENDICES**

**Appendix 1 – Wirral Council’s Love Wirral Strategy**

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Litter in England, The Local Environmental Quality Survey Of England 2017/18 -  
[https://www.keepbritaintidy.org/sites/default/files/resource/National%20Litter%20Survey%20201718\\_0.pdf](https://www.keepbritaintidy.org/sites/default/files/resource/National%20Litter%20Survey%20201718_0.pdf)

The Residents Survey of 2017, Ipsos Mori -  
<https://www.wirral.gov.uk/sites/default/files/all/About%20the%20council/Wirral%20Plan/Wirral%20Residents%20survey%20results%202017.pdf>

The information on the number of reports of areas of dog fouling concerns has been extracted from the Council’s CRM system.

Tonnage data has been provided by Merseyside Recycling and Waste Authority, as part of monthly reporting and monitoring.

## **SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)**

<b>Council Meeting</b>	<b>Date</b>
Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee	22 October 2020
Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee	16 March 2021