

9th February 2012

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The Environment Scrutiny and Performance Panel report into dog fouling.

Ward(s) All

Portfolios: Cllr Z Ali – Communities and Partnerships

Executive Summary:

On the 16th March 2011 Cabinet endorsed the recommendations of the Dog Fouling Working Group in terms of the Councils response to this high profile community issue. The Environment Scrutiny and Performance Panel has now asked for a report to be compiled confirming what actions have been taken in response to these recommendations.

Reason for scrutiny:

The Environment Scrutiny and Performance Panel previously identified the need to consider dog fouling after receiving a Citizens Panel survey that took place in autumn 2009, which revealed that 41% of respondents were concerned about dog fouling. The Scrutiny and Performance Panel established a working group to consider and report on the problems being experienced in Walsall.

Following submission of all the evidence to the Dog Fouling Working Group a report was submitted to Environment Scrutiny and Performance Panel on 4 January 2011 which concluded that dog fouling was a significant issue of concern and that the Council should endeavour to protect people from the risks associated with it. In order to achieve that aim 13 recommendations were proposed.

This report seeks to update the Environment Scrutiny and Performance Panel of the actions taken in response to the Working Groups recommendations.

Recommendations:

That:

1. Environment Scrutiny and Performance Panel note the actions taken to date as regards dog fouling.
2. That Environment Scrutiny and Performance Panel approve the proposed methodology for tackling dog fouling through Area Partnerships.

Background papers:

Dog Fouling Working Group Report.

Resource and legal considerations:

Funding for the promotional activities mentioned within this report has been made available by Area Partnerships. Other costs including those of staffing have been met from within the Public Safety budget.

When undertaking enforcement exercises the staff concerned need to abide by various pieces of legislation that control for example the collection of evidence and interviewing of suspects (Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984) and undertaking directed surveillance (Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000). Officers also have to abide by the Public Safety Enforcement Policy and have regard to the Enforcement Concordat and the Code for Crown Prosecutors this ensures the investigations are fair and proportionate and that evidence will withstand legal scrutiny.

Citizen impact:

The purpose of the Dog Fouling Working Group Review was in response to a Citizens Panel survey highlighting concern amongst 41% of residents regarding the impact dog fouling could have on their communities and health. The work of the Public Safety service safeguards public health through a combination of education and enforcement and it is intended this continues through the current restructure and into the future.

Environmental impact:

Dog fouling is unsightly, malodorous and can pose a significant risk to human and animal health. The presence of faeces particularly in larger quantities can deter people especially parents and children from using the green spaces that are a facility to be used to improve their health and well being. Presence of dog faeces on grassed areas can lead to reduced or suspended maintenance of that grassed area giving the locality an unkempt appearance

Performance management:

Risk: The present economic climate and reduction in budgets available to the council may have a detrimental impact on the ability of the service to respond to the needs of residents. Restructuring the service has allowed the workload to be shared amongst a wider group of officers however future reductions in budget may impair this work.

Equality Implications:

These proposals seek to benefit all parts of the community equally and will be applied consistently across the Borough unless a scheme of prioritisation identifies a particular need in a particular area. Should a situation arise where groups with specific needs are identified officers will work closely with partners to accommodate those needs to ensure there is no negative impact.


Consultation:

This issue has been raised with the Walsall Housing Working Group, Area Community Meetings and Area Partnership Meetings and at the Safer Walsall Partnership Board for strategic direction in terms of enforcement activities.

As can be evidenced from the report the service has taken the issue to many Community Groups as part of its educational role and interacted with residents over the perceived need in their area.

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1. Response to Recommendations of the Dog Fouling Working Group

A. Press coverage of this issue should be used to raise awareness of the health risks to children from dog fouling.

The service is shortly to embark on the first phase of a new process developed for targeting hot spot dog fouling sites in liaison with Area Partnerships. To raise the awareness of this new approach and raise the profile of the hazards associated with dog fouling a press release is currently being prepared.

The anti fouling message has been promoted using the Public Safety web site, facebook site and Twitter facilities.

Information has also been provided for display on the First Stop Express as it travels around the Borough, specific initiatives using the First Stop Express are identified in section 2.

B. Awareness of enforcement activity is raised, not excluding publication of the numbers of people fined, through press coverage and public education.

There is a commitment within the Public Safety service generally to publicise any convictions in Court for environmental crimes. Where Fixed Penalty Notices are issued consideration will be given to the appropriateness of a press release for targeted projects or for the general outcomes of enforcement activities over a given time scale. Meetings with the Police recently have highlighted the need for good intelligence to direct resources to the areas of most need.

C. Area partnerships are encouraged to provide assistance with funding for signs in their locality where this is an issue.

A report was submitted to each Local Area Partnership through the Area Community Meetings in June 2011 advising of the recommendations of the Dog Fouling Working Group. Since that date activities have taken place across the 6 Area Partnerships both at specific events and in general terms. The list of events attended to promote the anti fouling message are listed in section 2. Area Partnerships have to date funded over £1200 of publicity material for this campaign including 30,000 antifouling leaflets and 500 posters. During 2011 3500 antifouling signs were erected in over 250 streets in the Borough in response to concerns raised by residents, businesses, elected members and partner agencies.

D. Area partnerships are provided with stencils and guidance (as used by formed LNPs) to allow nominated community representatives to spray the 'no dog fouling' message on footpaths in Walsall.

It appears that some of the stencils originally distributed through the LNP's have fallen into disuse or been lost. 10 new stencils have been ordered for use by the Environmental Health service and Park Rangers in order that an effective response can be delivered in hot spot locations

E. Educational materials on dog fouling are displayed in a range of places such as pet shops, supermarkets and vets with hot spot areas targeted.

As stated above over 500 posters have been distributed to premises across Walsall bearing the anti fouling message. Including vets, dog boarding kennels, pet shops, council parks, leisure centres and libraries, WHG and other social landlord offices and the First Stop Express.

Area Partnerships have paid for 4000 anti fouling leaflets. These are being delivered to properties in the vicinity of hot spot fouling locations as well as being made available for use by Area Managers in other promotional activities. Community perception letters are also delivered to properties promoting the anti fouling message and asking for help in addressing the problem.

F. Registered social landlords are asked to promote responsible dog ownership through their resident communications and are encouraged to provide signage as appropriate.

A report was submitted to the Walsall Housing Working Group in August 2011 advising of the work being undertaken on dog fouling and asking for the support of all social landlords in tackling this anti social activity. Social Landlords have assisted in promoting the message through their housing offices and some joint working on hot spot locations. Caldmore Housing Association won a Gold Award in 2011 for its work on Animal Welfare including its effectiveness in dealing with nuisance from tenant's pets.

G. The service should inform the public that it is an offence to allow dog fouling, this should include shock tactics. Awareness of the law relating to dog fouling and enforcement activity should be raised, not excluding publication of the numbers of people fined, through press coverage and public education – such as attendance at community events, schools, residents groups, Neighbourhood Watch, street champions, area management forums and any other public format that can spread the message of good dog ownership.

The image used in the leaflet/posters of a small child playing in a park near dog faeces was considered appropriate to shock people and reinforce the anti fouling message.

This image has been reproduced on 500 posters and 30000 leaflets. 26000 leaflets have been distributed to all primary school children within the Borough. The remaining supply of 4000 leaflets are available for use by Area Partnerships in any targeted activity they wish to undertake. The image has been produced electronically through the council web

site, Public Safety facebook site and Twitter.

The general anti fouling signs have been updated to include the 'warning serious health risk' as well as the information about fines. 3500 of these signs have been ordered and erected during 2011

In terms of Community Events as can be seen from the list in section 2 the Reassurance Officers in particular have been active in informing the public with regard to the anti fouling message. The Events they have attended cut across all ages and all areas of the Borough including 39 events on board the First Stop Express, several Police led community meetings and many other community group meetings.

The Neighbourhood Watch secretary for Aldridge also arranged for information on anti fouling, including how to report offences to be included in their newsletter which was circulated to 19000 residences.

- H. The working group recommend that educational materials are used to get the message of dog fouling enforcement across, Members suggested that market stalls, the one stop shop bus, and events as part of the 'not in my neighbourhood week' are methods which could be used to get the message of dog fouling enforcement and education across.**

Sections 1 and 2 of this report should reassure members that the anti fouling message has been distributed through a great many channels in the last 12 months.

The distribution of anti fouling leaflets to 26000 school children through liaison with SERCO and as requested by Councillor Ali was a significant investment in terms of raising the profile of this campaign

- I. In consideration of limited resources, areas are prioritised for intensive patrolling through intelligence on hot spots and through area partnerships**

Through discussion with Area Managers a process has been developed whereby hot spot dog fouling areas are identified and tackled on a number of fronts.

The hot spot area will be identified through scrutiny of data held by Street Pride, Environmental Health and Green Spaces by the Borough Analysts. A hot spot may also be identified anecdotally at Area Community meetings or Area Partner meetings if agreed upon by the Area Manager.

Once the hot spot is identified a team of Officers notably Animal Control, Public Safety Enforcement and Reassurance will visit the site and make an assessment. Where other services are needed i.e. Green Spaces, WHG, Street Pride they will also be asked to attend. Animal Control will ensure signage and stencilling is appropriately undertaken in the surrounding area unless it is a site for which Green Spaces and

therefore the Park Rangers have responsibility. Reassurance will deliver leaflets and residents survey letters asking for assistance in tackling the problem and raising the issue of the hazards associated with fouling. In certain cases and with agreement of the Area Manager consultation will be undertaken on whether a dog waste bin would be appropriate for the site.

The Enforcement Officer will identify any patrolling opportunities for discussion with local Police representatives to try and catch offenders.

Once this initial work is completed the site will be reviewed to see if any improvements have been made.

J. The public safety reassurance team are approached to work with schools and consult the public to educate about dog ownership.

The role of the Reassurance Team is to work both internally and with other agencies to promote key safety messages to residents of the Borough. They ensure that where an opportunity presents itself to promote the anti fouling message that they will do so. The activities they have undertaken have been listed In section 2. All primary schools in the Borough have received leaflets regarding dog fouling and this has led to many parents and some schools contacting the service to report issues

K. The working group recommend that posters using shock tactics are displayed in parks and open spaces used by dog walkers. The working group suggested that the posters displayed should demonstrate the dangers of dog fouling, including toxocara.

These posters have been erected with Green Spaces approval and assistance.

L. The recommendations in this report should be reviewed by the Environment Scrutiny and Performance Panel in September 2011.

This document reviews the work carried out so far.

M. The report is sent to Cabinet, Registered Social Landlords and Area Partnerships.

The report was submitted to cabinet on the 16th March 2011, Registered Social landlords through the Walsall Housing Working Group in August 2011 and Area Partnerships through the Area Community Meetings in June 2011.

2. Community events attended by Reassurance Officers to promote the Anti Fouling Message

First Stop Shop Express Events:

St Johns Methodist Church – 4 events
ST Martins Church – 5 events
Hardwick Arms – 4 events
Anchor Road – 7 events
Alwreych House – 2 events
Cedar Tree PH – 1 Event
Collingwood Centre – 6 events
Pelsall village – 6 events
Small Street Centre – 1 event
Alumwell School – 1 event
Park Hall Shops – 1 event
Stan Ball Centre – 1 event

Attendance at Events Organised by other Agencies.

Caldmore Police Beat Team organised a coffee morning for residents we attended 10 of these events.

The Bentley Police Beat Team organised the opportunity for the over 50's to go and watch a film at discounted rate we attended 5 of these events.

Drop in Surgery at Streetly Library
Walsall Police Christmas Market – 2 events.
Growing old in Pheasey – 3 events
Growing old in Streetly
Sunnymead Way over 50's health event
Caldmore Village Festival
Chuckery Celebration Day
New Invention Methodist Church over 50's day
Walsall Fire Station Open day
Silver Surfers day with the MOVE truck Bloxwich Leisure Centre
Park Hall Community Association Open Evening
Walsall Police Station Open Day
Lighthouse Children's Centre Christmas Event
Brownhills Community Association Open Day
Age UK Open Day
Old Hall People Partnership Open Day
Willenhall Memorial Park Safety Day
Walsall NHS Expert Patient Programme day

Meet and greet events with the following organisations and groups

Bloxwich Over 50's club
Beechdale over 50's club
Aldridge NW
Walsall Borough NW
Orchard Hills NW

Pleck NW
Beacon NW
New Invention Methodist Church
Willenhall CHART Over 50's club
Victory club group
Rushall NW
Brownhills and Walsall Wood Fellowship
Brownhills Fellowship
Parkhall CA
Darlsaton All Active
Brownhills CA
Moxley People's Centre
Old Hall People's Partnership
Union of Muslim Organisations.

Anti fouling leaflet drops in Streetly – Sunnymead Way, Goodwood Drive, Boundary Road, Valley Road, St Michaels Way to do with dog fouling in Public alley ways.