

Information/Discussion Paper

Overview & Scrutiny Committee – 27 April 2015

Update on the recommendations of the dog fouling scrutiny task group

This note contains the information to keep Members informed of matters relating to the work of the Committee, but where no decisions from Members are needed

1. Why has this come to scrutiny?

- 1.1 Members have requested an update on the recommendations of the scrutiny task group on dog fouling, which were subsequently adopted by Cabinet on 15th April 2014.

2. Summary of the Issue

- 2.1 A review of dog fouling was initiated by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in July 2013 and a task group was set up with defined terms of reference.
- 2.2 Following a number of meetings and site visits, the scrutiny task group came up with 13 recommendations to enhance efforts to reduce dog fouling in Cheltenham.
- 2.3 The report of the scrutiny task group was considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (O & S) on 3 March 2014, and Cabinet subsequently approved the recommendations on 15th April 2014.
- 2.4 Since the O&S review of dog fouling, the Community Protection team has been moved to the newly formed Environmental & Regulatory Services Division along with the rest of Public Protection. The anticipated fast-track commissioning review has evolved into the REST project (Regulatory and Environmental Services Transformation). The second phase of REST commenced on 1st April 2015 and is a radical systems thinking service review of community protection work such as envirocrimes, dog-related issues, and the implementation of new powers under the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014.
- 2.5 The improved or new processes relating to community protection work (including dog fouling) will be designed from the customer's perspective to support the service purpose of a clean and safe town.
- 2.6 There has been a decline in the directly available resource to tackle dog fouling since the recommendations of the STG. For example, a post has been seconded to licensing enforcement, and the team have additional duties in side waste enforcement. However, the systems thinking review will quantify resourcing shortfalls after service prioritisation has occurred, and any business cases arising will be escalated for appropriate consideration.

3. Summary of information

3.1 The following table provides an update for each STG recommendation, and highlights any issues with implementation. Section 4 discusses next steps that Members may wish to consider to progress the issue further.

| Dog fouling STG recommendation | Narrative |
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| <p>1. Ensure press releases are issued to provide information about the council's efforts to tackle dog fouling and successful enforcement action.</p> | <p>Press releases have been issued about dog awareness days in various locations such as Springfield Park and Clyde Crescent, as well as about responsible dog ownership enforcement. Updates have also been provided internally through the fortnightly Leaders Briefings.</p> <p>The recent Keep Britain Tidy campaign pilot was also promoted in the local press by our Green Spaces partners in the project.</p> |
| <p>2. Introduce bin stickers to highlight that bagged dog waste could be disposed of using standard public litter bins / investigate sponsorship opportunities of bins</p> | <p>Dog owners can now dispose of faeces in any litter bin, using any bag. Although the Community Protection team do not have responsibility for bins or their related signage, we discussed the use of waterproof stickers on standard litter bins as part of the wider joint waste strategy. These are now being deployed by Ubico.</p> <p>The team have not investigated sponsorship opportunities for dog waste bins because dog waste can be placed in standard litter bins so this would be an unnecessary expense. At the time of the STG report, Members were informed that it costs £380 to £400 to install a dog waste bin with an annual cost to the council of £5630 for the emptying and haulage of these dog waste bins.</p> <p>During the pilot of the Keep Britain Tidy 'we're watching you' campaign, promotional bin stickers were used in trial areas. These reinforced the message that any litter bin can be used for dog waste, as well as providing a visual glow-in-the-dark reminder that dog fouling offences can be reported to the council for investigation. Please see item 5 on this table for more information about the campaign.</p> |
| <p>3. Increase the use of dog floor stencils/blue spray circling</p> | <p>Increased floor stencilling has taken place in areas where reports of dog fouling indicate it would be of benefit – examples include entrances to parks like Caernarvon Park and on footpaths. Spray circling is also used to measure the incidence of fouling (eg Hatherley Park). To some extent, these measures can act as a deterrent to potential offenders as it is clear the council's officers are monitoring the area –</p> |

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| | <p>however, some members of the public feel antagonised by this approach and would rather resource went to clearing the faeces.</p> <p>Stencils continue to be used where the ground is suitable and particularly where there is an 'entrance' to the dog fouling location such as a park gate or footpath barrier. However, there is no local evidence to suggest the use of stencils/spray reduce dog fouling as initiatives on their own. The situation is more that an increased visible enforcement presence has a temporary improvement on an area that subsides soon after the resource is redeployed.</p> |
| <p>4. Investigate funding streams or sponsorship to reintroduce free dog waste bags in targeted hot spot areas</p> | <p>This action has not been progressed as it does not support the current policy of the joint waste committee strategy. Dog faeces can be placed in any bag (eg carrier bag, nappy bag, bread bag, food bag) and to reintroduce branded dog waste bags may suggest that they are the only suitable receptacle. The message is that any bag can be used as long as the faeces is picked up. Para 4.2.7 of the STG report noted that 'Evidence has also suggested that despite the council withdrawing free dog bags several years ago, people were purchasing and using their own which were now very widely available for as little as £1 for 200 bags', which also indicates this action is not a priority, and in fact, may not even be appropriate.</p> |
| <p>5. Initiate hard-hitting anti-dog fouling campaigns</p> | <p>The community protection team engaged in a Keep Britain Tidy dog fouling campaign with the Parks Department. The campaign involved 4 dog fouling hotspot areas (Warden Hill footpaths around the primary school; KGV playing fields; Springfield Park and Sandford Park ornamental side) and a count/cleanse of dog faeces deposits was carried out first to provide baseline data. Glow in the dark posters with the 'we're watching you' message were displayed, along with the use of bin stickers. The team then revisited each area weekly to see if there was an increase or decrease in fouling incidence. Priors Farm was chosen as a control site, which meant no posters were displayed, although deposits were sprayed and counted. The aim of the trial was to see if the posters had an effect on people's behaviour.</p> <p>The results demonstrated a 41% reduction in fouling incidence overall, with the greatest decrease in Warden Hill of 74% (from 72 original deposits to 8 new ones in the final week). However, the larger parks did not experience the same decrease with KGV falling by 6% (from 152 deposits to 77) and</p> |

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| | <p>Springfield Park decreasing to 3% (from 183 to 151). This may be because the centre of those areas are a considerable distance from the posters around the perimeter.</p> <p>The trial was resource intensive in that it took 76.3 officer hours to achieve the overall 41% reduction across all trial sites. For example, in Warden Hill this equated to 15 minutes of officer time for every less deposit. In Sandford Park and KGV this works out approximately 25 minutes of officer time for each less deposit. It is interesting to note that the control site of Priors Farm saw a 61% reduction despite not displaying posters which indicates the visible presence of the council may be a contributory factor. There was no increase in reported dog fouling offences as a direct result of the campaign.</p> <p>It is recommended that the use of the glow in the dark posters is deployed to tackle hot spot areas along with spot monitoring.</p> |
| <p>6. Provide better information on the website/use social media to get the anti-dog fouling message across</p> | <p>The team have explored having a facebook or twitter presence dedicated to responsible dog ownership issues such as cleaning up after fouling, and preventing dogs from straying. The advice from the communications team is that the content is unlikely to be enough to ensure daily interest, so the preference is to use the corporate accounts to communicate these messages. There are plans to develop this, along with the website, if resource becomes available.</p> <p>The use of the internet and social media is likely to be explored further as part of the systems thinking review to improve service delivery.</p> |
| <p>7. Continue to encourage and attend community events</p> | <p>There has been a series of responsible dog ownership awareness days over the summer of 2014 with various partners. Anti-dog fouling has been the key message delivered by the team.</p> <p>The team are highly unlikely to have the resource to attend similar events this year due to the service review taking priority. Although attendance is useful in theory to promote awareness and education, the team have found that the public who engage with them tend to be dog owners who are already responsible. The incidence of dog fouling in that park or area quickly returns to its usual level once uniformed officers leave.</p> |
| <p>8. Introduce a regular programme of visits and work by Community</p> | <p>Not actioned due to insufficient resource. The team have, however, honoured existing commitments such as talks for the police cubs, and partner events such</p> |

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| Protection Officers in schools | as dog awareness days. |
| 9. Encourage public involvement in tackling dog fouling/build on the Partners and Communities Together (PACT) initiative | <p>The PACT initiative has been disbanded due to lack of resource to lead it. However, the team have engaged with other council services who may be able to acquire funding to tackle dog issues (for example, the commissioning team and park rangers) with the aim of involving the public through a strength based approach. The public have also been encouraged to tackle dog fouling through the dog awareness days, and the 'We're watching you' campaign in trial areas promoted reporting mechanisms for offences.</p> <p>As part of the emerging processes from the current service review, the team are trialling the use of dog fouling monitoring logs to engage the strength of the local community. The primary outcome our customers tell us they want is to have the faeces removed, but they are also keen that perpetrators are penalised. The logs have a two-fold aim:</p> <p>a) to deliver the message that the council and local communities are working together and offenders could be 'spotted' at any time of the day or night.</p> <p>b) to target the team's resource at hot spot areas based on evidence supplied.</p> <p>It is too soon to evaluate the effectiveness of the monitoring logs, but early indications are highly encouraging. In the (long) pilot street, the incidence of fresh deposits fell from 50 to 0 in the two weeks after the logs were delivered to every resident. Interestingly, no logs have been returned yet.</p> |
| 10. Trial a multi-agency approach – undertake joint patrols with CPOs and PCSOs to demonstrate positive cross service support for this exercise, work together with Cheltenham Borough Homes on this issue | <p>The team does not have control over the work of the police or CBH, but has worked with these partners where their priorities and resources permit. Examples are working with the PCSOs on patrols of the Honeybourne Line and briefing CBH teams on the work of the CPOs.</p> <p>The community protection provisions of the new ASB legislation will result in a multi-agency approach to activities that impact negatively on the quality of life of a community or area, including irresponsible dog ownership.</p> |
| 11. Investigate opportunities to use mobile CCTV in dog fouling hotspot areas; improve signage along with targeted enforcement in hotspot areas | <p>The acquisition of mobile CCTV was not possible as no budgetary provision was made to implement these recommendations. We will take advantage of any opportunities such as sharing a camera with a partner or the police, although their priorities will be higher level crimes such as fly tipping and anti-social behaviour.</p> |

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| | <p>There are legal considerations concerning the use of covert cameras, such as proving necessity for an authorisation under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA). However, this will be explored further through the REST project.</p> <p>The team do increase signage where intelligence suggests it is necessary and undertake targeted surveillance and enforcement as appropriate – for example, Caernarvon Park and Wells Close. The use of signage seemed successful in the Keep Britain Tidy campaign trial, and section 4 suggests how this could be taken forward.</p> |
| <p>12. Ensure the Community Protection Team has the resources to fulfil its duties in this area including seeking external sources of funding.</p> | <p>The financial implications of the Cabinet report stated that the recommendations would have to be delivered within existing budget. As a result, there are sometimes conflicting service demands and priorities. This will be addressed by the current service review (REST) as it will re-align our more efficient processes with customer requirements. It is likely that a business case for increased resource will arise from the review, however this may be linked to technology rather than staffing.</p> <p>External sources of funding are not currently an option for salaries but the team is exploring ways of thrifty service delivery – from making their own floor stencils to sharing costs with the Parks Manager for the Keep Britain Tidy glow-in-the-dark anti-dog fouling poster campaign (which also supported recommendations 1, 5, 6 and 9).</p> <p>The team are also keen to link with the resources of other services such as Commissioning and Green Environment (for example, if a community initiative were to be funded).</p> |
| <p>13. Publicise the good work the Community Protection Officers undertake across the borough</p> | <p>Carried out through press releases, public awareness days and Leaders' Briefings.</p> |

4. Next Steps

- 4.1** Members may wish to approve an update to the original recommendations (as listed in the table at para 3.1) by way of this report, so that it reflects current council policy and position.
- 4.2** It is proposed that recommendations 1, 5, 6, 7, 9, 11, 12 and 13 are considered in the current review of the community protection service. Section 3 explains how these recommendations are being implemented where possible.

4.3 It is suggested that the following recommendations are not taken forward for the reasons given:

Recommendation 2: bin stickers have been introduced, and Ubico are the appropriate agency with regard additional bins and the emptying of them.

Recommendation 3: further increasing the use of stencils and sprays would not result in a proportionate reduction in dog fouling. However, the team will continue to deploy them as 'business as usual'.

Recommendation 4: for reasons given in table at para 4.1. Any bag can now be used to pick up dog faeces.

Recommendation 8: lack of resource to do this and proactively enforce/engage with customers.

Recommendation 10: specific dog-fouling multi-agency patrols are unlikely to occur, due to competing priorities of partners. However, the team will continue to work with partners on this issue, for example through case discussions.

4.4 The REST project will shape the future delivery of the dog fouling service, and this will be reported through the existing project mechanism for updating Members.

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| Background Papers | Cabinet report: https://democracy.cheltenham.gov.uk/documents/s12241/2014_04_15_CAB_OS_Dog_fouling_covering_report.pdf STG report: https://democracy.cheltenham.gov.uk/documents/s11849/STG%20Report%20Dog%20Fouling_WITHPHOTOSTEST.pdf |
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