

Dog Fouling Position Paper



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Executive Summary

Keep Wales Tidy has examined the local environmental quality issue of dog fouling, and has reached the conclusion that the best means of addressing the problem of dog fouling is through long term public education campaigns, along with enforcement.

Our policy on dog fouling is 'Public education and law enforcement are the only long-term success measures for reducing dog fouling on our streets.' There have been many successful campaigns carried out throughout Wales highlighting the problem of dog fouling, through the use of mascots in the Vale of Glamorgan, flags highlighting dog mess in Kenfig National Nature Reserve and the ongoing education program in the Sandfields East and Aberavon area. '

Dog Fouling affects 14% of streets surveyed in Wales¹, and frequently tops people's list of concerns regarding litter and refuse found on the streets. Local Authorities in Wales have adopted a combination of campaign elements to help tackle dog fouling. Posters and displays in public areas are the most frequently used method, while enforcement, media coverage, leaflet distribution, provision of free poop scoops, and dog waste bins are also frequently used. With a number of authorities working with schools to educate children about dog fouling and the health risks associated with it².

Introduction

Estimates put the UK dog population between 6.5 and 7.4 million, producing 1,000 tonnes of excrement per day². Research carried out by ENCAMS into public attitudes towards local environmental quality issues, shows that dog fouling is consistently regarded as a major problem that needs tackling³. The key issues surrounding dog fouling are that 14% of streets surveyed by Keep Wales Tidy during 2006 recorded a presence of dog faeces¹, also the health implications associated with dog fouling, and who needs to take responsibility for clearing up the mess.

Health Implications

Dog faeces is an issue of environmental health in the form of Toxocariasis, this is an infection of the roundworm *Toxocara canis*. Human infection of the disease is a direct consequence of soil contamination with faeces carrying eggs of the parasite. The parasite can last for up to two years in contaminated soil, so the problem remains even as the faeces degrade. The parasite can only effect humans if swallowed, this is often from hands but can also occur from contact with inanimate objects such as the wheels of toys, soles of shoes and the wheels of prams, once swallowed the infection can last between 6 and 24 months. *Toxocara* eggs are not infectious until they embryonate, this occurs 2-3 weeks after the dog mess has been left, therefore freshly deposited faeces are not infected and can be cleared up safely⁴.

The symptoms of toxocariasis are varied and include flu like symptoms, vague aches, dizziness, nausea, asthma and epileptic fits, the most commonly reported complaint however are eye disorders. This is by the transportation of larvae via the retinal artery to the eye, potentially causing blindness through the growth of non-malignant tumours or the development of detached retinas⁴. Toxocariasis is most commonly found in children aged between 18 months and 5 years, due to the fact that children's play areas are often found to be infected with *Toxocara Canis*⁴.

Who's Responsibility is it?

Local Authorities have a responsibility under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and the

Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005 to ensure that highways, public walkways and recreational areas are kept clear of dog faeces. However it is the responsibility of dog owners to clean up after their pets, and it is a punishable offence if they do not, local authorities have the power to demand that owners clear up after their dogs or face a £75 fixed penalty notice.

Legislation

Current legislation regarding dog fouling falls under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and The Dogs (Fouling of Land) Act 1996. These Acts are due to be replaced in March 2007 by Dog Control Orders (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Wales) Regulations 2007 which will implement sections 55 and 56 of the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005. The dog control orders provide for five offences, but the one which is of interest to us is for dog fouling. The penalty for committing an offence under a dog control order is a maximum fine of £1000, however the opportunity to pay a fixed penalty may be offered in place of prosecution. This legislation can be enforced by local authorities, community and town councils and other bodies who have been given the powers to issue dog control orders⁵.

People that are registered blind are exempt from the duty to remove dog faeces.

Strays

The percentage of stray dogs found on the streets also contributes to the problem of dog fouling. The Dogs Trust have been working in partnership with local authorities throughout Wales to reduce the number of strays on our streets, this will effect the quantity of dog fouling found. Since 1999 the dogs trust has seen a reduction in the number of strays by 13%, and Cardiff County Council has seen occupation of their kennels drop by 50% since working in partnership with the Dogs Trust⁶.

Options for Improvement – Good Practice

Public education is the only long-term success measure for preventing dog fouling, but in the interim, other measures can help raise awareness. Local Authorities in Wales have

adopted a combination of campaign elements to help tackle dog fouling. Posters and displays in public areas are the most frequently used method, while enforcement, media coverage, leaflet distribution, provision of free poop scoops, and dog waste bins are also frequently used. With a number of authorities working with schools to educate children about the health problems associated with dog fouling².

Awareness Raising Campaigns

The Vale of Glamorgan have put in place a policy which includes designated school initiatives, for example Victoria Junior School in Penarth, South Wales. The school had a huge problem with dog fouling on school playing fields, and in the area surrounding the school. The Vale of Glamorgan council decided to target every street and resident in the area, regardless of whether they owned a dog. This included a letter and leaflet drop, and speaking to parents at school opening and closing times. Enforcement Officers, dog wardens and local community support officers gave a talk at a school assembly, this was linked to the dangers of toxocarasis. Each pupil was given bags and leaflets to take home and give to somebody they knew who owned a dog. As part of this 'scoop campaign' a painting competition was launched and a dog costume was used to appeal to the children. Each child returned to school with the name of the person they had contacted and given their scoop bag to, prizes were handed out to the children following a prize draw. The aim of the campaign is to raise the awareness of dog fouling outside the school to parents, family and friends. The officers will return to each school on a regular basis to speak to new entrants so as not to miss new intake. The area targeted during the campaign is then monitored to ensure success and hopefully record a drop in the number of dog fouling offences⁷.

The Sandfields East and Aberavon Renewal Area have also embarked on a series of awareness Raising Campaigns. This involved working in partnership with local agencies including enforcement officers, local police, Keep Wales Tidy and Neath Port Talbot Renewal Team. The campaign involved leaflets being distributed to every home in Aberavon highlighting the legal implications of allowing dogs to foul as well as the health risks associated with dog faeces. Poop scoop bags were handed out to dog owners in the street and residents were encouraged to confidentially inform enforcement officers of repeat offenders. Part of this project involved a similar campaign to that adopted by the Vale of Glamorgan, where local school children took poop scoop bags home for their

friends and family, and were involved in a competition to draw a dog – winners were drawn out of a hat and book tokens were given out as prizes. Again the aim of the campaign was to get the children to take the message home to family and friends. Surveys indicate that the campaign has been successful in reducing the percentage of dog fouling on the streets of Sandfields East and Aberavon. Prior to the campaign a LEAMS survey showed that 33% of the streets surveyed in the area recorded dog fouling, whilst in the most recent survey this figure had fallen to 20%⁸. The team have also received comments from local residents and businesses stating that they have seen an improvement in street cleanliness since the start of the campaign⁹.

Bridgend County Borough Council run the Bag it, Tie it, Bin it campaign, the aim of which is to highlight the problem of dog fouling and remind people that it is an offence to allow their dogs to foul and that they can be prosecuted if they do not clear up after their animals. Enforcement officers will also be rewarding one responsible dog owner every month who is found clearing up after their pet. The authority have managed to get local shops and businesses involved in the campaign by placing the 'Bag it, Bin it, Tie it' poster in their windows. Kenfig National Nature Reserve have also joined in the campaign. Wardens at the reserve have put miniature flags with the bag it, tie it, bin it logo besides dog faeces found at the reserve, the wardens wanted to highlight the extent of the problem at the nature reserve. David Carrington reserve manager said 'It's an unusual tactic, but we want people to realise the extent of dog fouling and also help them avoid stepping in it. It's all the more shocking because we quickly ran out of flags and couldn't highlight every pile of dog mess that we found. Responsible dog owners have always been welcome at Kenfig National Nature Reserve and we've installed new waste bins at various locations around the reserve to make it easier to dispose of bagged up dog mess.'¹⁰

Dog Waste Bins

There is no legal requirement for authorities to provide special bins for dog waste, however it is a relatively easy way to try to encourage people to dispose of dog waste responsibly. In a Local Authority Dog Fouling Survey carried out by Keep Wales Tidy it was found that 29% of authorities in Wales do not provide dog waste bins. Most of those who stated that they did provide bins said that the disposal of their contents did not incur any extra costs². It may be something for those authorities who don't supply bins to consider.

Dog Warden Schemes and Enforcement

Another method for tackling the dog fouling problem is through the use of dog wardens.

The dog warden has three main roles:

- Enforcement – ensuring that legislation relating to dog fouling is adhered too.
- Education – to ensure people are aware of their legal obligations relating to dog fouling and to highlight the health risks associated with dog faeces.
- Practical – dealing with stray and nuisance dogs.¹¹

Conwy County Council employ two full time wardens whose roles include enforcing dog fouling legislation, issuing fixed penalty notices and promoting responsible dog ownership through education and by giving advice¹². Newtonabbey Borough Council have employed extra dog wardens for patrol at peak times during the day, this being early mornings, evenings and weekends when owners are most likely to take their dogs out¹³. In Hafod, wardens have been targeting dog fouling following complaints from local residents who expressed concern for their children playing in the park and falling in dog mess. Wardens have been involved in education campaigns, giving out leaflets explaining the dangers associated with dog faeces and outlining that not clearing up after your pet is an offence. The leaflet encourages residents to inform wardens about anyone seen allowing their dog to foul. Senior Hafod Warden Chris Standen said 'Anecdotal evidence from residents and parents who take their children to the park in the Hafod suggests the number of people letting their pets foul is reducing and that there has been less fouling in the local park.'¹⁴

Caerphilly County Borough Council operate a zero tolerance approach to dog fouling, the county has a team of four enforcement officers who have a regular patrol and also respond to complaints by ensuring they are in the places with problems at the right times. If an owner is found allowing their dog to foul they will be issued with a fixed penalty notice and failure to pay will see them in front of the magistrates. During the current financial year 2006- 2007, 67 fixed penalty notices have been issued for dog fouling and 5 of these have been taken to court and have led to prosecutions, with the average fine being £100 plus costs of approximately £85. 2005 -2006 saw 162 fixed penalty notices issued for dog fouling offences. Enforcement Officers hand out advertising leaflets and poop scoopers to ensure that the public are educated about their legal responsibilities, this also allows the authority to show responsible dog owners that they are doing something and that irresponsible owners will be fined. Members of the public are encouraged to report

irresponsible owners via their reporting line, also any requests for anti dog fouling signs will be met by the authority.¹⁵

Research carried out by Keep Wales Tidy found that every Local Authority in Wales employs dog wardens, however, with the time burdens of dealing with strays only 15% of their time is spent on enforcing legislation². The extensive time spent dealing with strays was seen as a concern, because it reduces the opportunities to deal with educating children and dog owners about the problems surrounding dog faeces².

Special Cleansing Operation

Hove Park have found an innovative way of tackling the issue of dog fouling, the 15.8 hectare site uses a system called FIDO (Faeces Intake Disposal Operation), this essentially is a quad bike with suction equipment attached to a long lance that sucks up faeces into a tank while the operator drives along. The scheme has received unrivalled comments from green flag award judges saying 'no evidence of dog fouling at all', and the park subsequently won the green flag award¹⁶.

DNA Testing

The Isle of Man have introduced DNA testing of dogs with the aim of irradicating dog fouling from the Island. The technology being used allows the police to match the faeces found with the the animal that produced it, enabling the authority to take action and prosecute irresponsible owners. The Isle of Man are encouraging local residents to report such owners to the enforcement team so that they can take appropriate action¹⁷.

Dog Registration

Isle of Anglesey County Council run a voluntary dog registration scheme, for a small fee the dog owner recieves a dog tag for their pet and a certificate to show that the dog is registered. The dog's details are held on a council database¹⁸, this allows owners to trace lost dogs and can also allow the responsibility for the dogs actions to be properly attributed. If a dog is found fouling land the owners details can be traced and appropriate action taken. Other authorities across the UK run voluntary registration schemes and many choose to use microchipping as the favoured method for identifying animals, this is where a small chip is inserted into the scruff of the animal with all its details electronically recorded onto the chip.

Conclusions

Dog fouling is of great concern to the general public, research carried out by ENCAMS indicates that many people believe dog fouling to be the worst kind of litter or refuse found in public places³. It is not only the visual impact of seeing dog faeces but also the health problems associated with it.

Keep Wales Tidy believe that:

Our policy on dog fouling is 'Public education and law enforcement are the only long-term success measures for reducing dog fouling on our streets.'

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