

Responsible Dog Ownership Strategy & Action Plan

This strategy sets out what the Council will do to encourage and promote responsible dog ownership, and the Council's commitment to tackling the antisocial behaviour of irresponsible dog owners.

2015 - 2018



Contents

Introduction	3
The Council's Corporate Plan	3
Strategic Aims and Objectives	4
Strategic Context	4
The Council	5
The Police	5
Scottish Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SSPCA)	5
Delivery	6
Education and Awareness	6
Actions on Education and Awareness	6
Actions on Education and Awareness Example	6
Promotional Activities and Events	7
Actions on Promotional Activities and Events	7
Actions on Promotional Activities and Events Example	7
Community Empowerment	7
Actions on Community Empowerment	8
Actions on Community Empowerment Example	8
Sharing Information and Intelligence	8
Actions on Sharing Information and Intelligence	8
Actions on Sharing Information and Intelligence Example	8
Enforcement	9
Actions on Enforcement	9
Actions on Enforcement Example	9
Partnerships	9
Actions on Partnerships	10
Actions of Partnerships Example	10
Resources	11
Performance Monitoring and Review	11

Introduction

Owning a dog can bring great pleasure and in many ways enriches our lives. This strategy recognises that the majority of dog owners do behave responsibly by caring for pets and fulfilling both their legal and moral obligations. However, it is also recognised that there are a small minority of owners whose behaviour, and consequently the manner in which they allow their dogs to behave, is irresponsible, antisocial and in some instances criminal.

The strategy outlines how Scottish Borders Council will encourage and promote responsible dog ownership and enforce available legislation to address dog control issues.

Dog control issues such as fouling, stray dogs and nuisance dogs can adversely affect the environment and people's enjoyment of it. This strategy sets out how we intend to tackle nuisance dog activity and the anti-social behaviour of irresponsible dog owners.

The Council's Corporate Plan

Scottish Borders Council's Corporate Plan 2012/13 – 2017/18 sets out the overarching vision for the Scottish Borders and the Council. Our vision is 'to seek the best quality of life for all the people in the Scottish Borders, prosperity for our businesses and good health and resilience for all our communities'.

The Plan also identified a number of broad aims and a set of priorities that support a number of areas where the Council has a role to play namely, 'Maintaining and improving our high quality environment' and 'Building the capacity and resilience of our communities and voluntary sector.'

The 'Maintaining and improving our high quality environment' theme is concerned with our high quality environment is maintenance and enhanced.

- **We will continue to provide frontline responses in emergencies e.g. severe weather or flooding, but will increasingly work with communities so they can mitigate the effects of such situations and help us to respond safely at a local level**

The 'Building the capacity and resilience of our communities and voluntary sector' theme is about helping communities to help themselves; we will relieve some of the burden on the public sector as well as ensuring that communities stay safe and resilient.

- **We must explore the ways in which we can work with communities**
- **Strengthen the capacity of the voluntary sector to support their involvement in the delivery of public services**

The Council has listened to the views expressed by local people about local issues and the impact these issues have on quality of life. Antisocial behaviour and crime, was considered

to be the most important area the Council can influence. This strategy acknowledges these views and therefore provides a response that:

- **Focuses on behavioural change, prevention and tackling the underlying causes of dog fouling, straying and the antisocial behaviour of irresponsible dog owners, and**
- **Strengthens the Council's approach to enforcement of the law as and where this is necessary**

Strategic Aims and Objectives

This strategy aims to protect public health by

- Reducing dog fouling
- Reducing incidents relating to noise caused by dogs
- Respond to reports of stray dogs and injury caused by dog attacks

It also aims to promote the welfare of dogs.

The overarching objective of the Responsible Dog Ownership Strategy is the promotion and encouragement of responsible dog ownership and the specific objectives of this strategy can be summarised as follows:

- To educate dog owners in the principles of responsible dog ownership.
- To raise awareness of the legal responsibilities associated with dog ownership.
- To reduce the number of dog fouling instances through education, partnership working and enforcement.
- To improve the use of information and intelligence and share this with key partners.
- To clarify and raise awareness of the roles and responsibilities of Scottish Borders Council and those of our key partners including Police Scotland.
- To improve and simplify the way in which members of the public can report instances of dog fouling.
- To work more closely with communities on developing local solutions.
- To ensure that robust enforcement action is taken, where appropriate.

Strategic Context

Responsibility for a dog's actions ultimately rests with the owner or where the owner is absent, the person in control of the dog. However, Scottish Borders Council and its partners, including POLICE Scotland, SSPCA, Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) and Community Groups share a number of responsibilities, including , enforcement responsibilities in relation to dangerous dogs, out of control dogs and dog welfare. These responsibilities are summarised below:

The Council

- **Collection of stray dogs**
- **A 'duty of care' to the animals in its care i.e. collected stray dogs**
- **Primary responsibility for the enforcement of dog fouling legislation**

In addition to the above, the Council is also responsible for:

- **The investigation and enforcement of statutory nuisances including noise from barking dogs, nuisance attributable to the manner in which animals are kept and accumulations of dog mess on private land, and**
- **The licensing of animal boarding establishments, pet shops and dog breeders**
- **Taking action on out of control dogs under the Control of Dogs (Scotland) Act 2010 and preventing such dogs becoming dangerous dogs.**
- **Taking action in conjunction with the Police, on dangerous dogs including those breeds that are prohibited by the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991. Authorised Council Officers can seize any prohibited dog or dog they consider to be dangerously out of control provided it is in a public place.**

The Police

- **Primary responsibility for dangerous dogs including those breeds that are prohibited by the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991. Officers are permitted to seize any prohibited dog or any dog they consider to be dangerously out of control whether it is in a public or private place subject to a warrant being obtained if a dangerous dog is thought to be within private locked premises.**
- **Primary responsibility under the Guard Dogs Act 1975**
- **Responsibility for dogs worrying livestock**

Scottish Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SSPCA)

- **Investigate abuse and prevent cruelty**
- **Rescue animals in danger**
- **Find pets new homes**

This strategy recognises the need for effective partnership working with these and other agencies and also with community groups and voluntary organisations, as it is through these partnerships that long term behavioural changes can be achieved and sustained.

Delivery

Broadly speaking, the Council aims to achieve its objectives by way of the following:

Education and Awareness

The Council will seek to ensure that information and advice is made available to both dog owners, and to persons who may be experiencing antisocial behaviour caused by irresponsible dog owners thereby improving access to the right services and organisations.

Special emphasis will be placed on ensuring that young persons have access to advice and information and are educated in the ways of responsible dog ownership as they will not only be dog owners in the future, but also have the opportunity now to influence the behaviour of parents and other adults and young people around them. We will therefore investigate the most appropriate and effect ways of engaging younger people and bringing these messages to them.

To underpin the above and the Council's broader activities around the promotion of responsible dog ownership, we will formulate a Communications Plan to ensure that key messages are communicated using a variety of media (including the appropriate use of signage).

Actions on Education and Awareness

- **Raise awareness of the legal responsibilities associated with dog ownership**
- **Provide information and advice to dog owners to enable and support compliance with the law**
- **Review and improve use of all communication tools, maximising use of social media, and develop a communications plan**
- **Look at better use of resources who are currently working with schools such as the Waste Services team and the Dog Control Officer**
- **Introduce the use of Street Stencils to tackle dog fouling in known problem areas**
- **Introduce new bins to known dog fouling hotspots which can carry key messages/publicity material**
- **Review signage across all bins**
- **Identify key sites for new anti-dog fouling metal signs**

Action on Education and Awareness Example – Anti Dog Fouling Media Film

We have commissioned an anti-dog fouling media film from pupils of Hawick High School.

The School has a team of pupils who regularly produce video news bulletins to keep their fellow students, teachers and parent's up to date with school and local events. These are broadcast via their own YouTube Channel, through their Facebook and Twitter pages.

The team have produced a two minute news report video which discusses the health risks of dog fouling and includes interviews with local dog walkers. The team have also coined the slogan – ‘Bag the poo – any litter bin will do’.

The video will support the launch of the Council’s new Dog Fouling Strategy and will be linked to the Council’s website and social media channels.

Promotional Activities and Events

The Council will seek to enable, facilitate and deliver a range of promotional activities and events working in partnership with other agencies, businesses, and voluntary and community groups.

These activities and events may involve Council Officers, charities and interest groups, national organisations and suppliers of services and products.

Actions on promotional Activities and Events

- **Support and participate in local and national campaigns**
- **Actively support Keep Scotland Beautiful and work with them to develop key campaigns locally**
- **Participate in the national Dog Fouling Strategy Forum**

Action on promotional Activities and Events Example – Micro Chipping Campaign

The Scottish Government is introducing compulsory micro chipping of dogs on 1 April 2016, which will aim to reunite lost or stolen dogs with their owners.

The Council has played a positive role in supporting this initiative, working alongside The Dogs Trust and the People’s Dispensary for Sick Animals (PDSA) to hold a series of free micro chipping events in 2015.

Over 1,000 dogs were chipped during 2015, with one event at Hawick seeing an impressive 184 dogs chipped.

In addition, the Council is supporting the first sponsored dog walk event taking place in Galashiels on Sunday 13 March 2016. The event, run by Gala Cricket Club and Borders Pet Rescue (BPR), will see the BPR offer micro chipping for a small fee to cover costs.

Community Empowerment

Our communities and individuals within these communities have an important role to play in influencing behaviour and the provision of support, advice and assistance to other dog owners, and potentially to those affected by the actions of irresponsible dog owners.

The Council is keen to explore how it can support people and businesses in coming together to do things for themselves that will have a positive impact on their communities, environment and quality of life:

Actions on Community Empowerment

- **Work with communities on developing local solutions**
- **Develop an ‘anti-dog fouling toolkit’ which can be used by local communities**
- **Promote key initiatives e.g. The Green Dog Walkers and the WOOFs campaign**

Actions on Community Empowerment Example – Green Dog Walkers

The Green Dog Walkers (GDW) campaign was patented by Falkirk Council and has been running since 2008. Each GDW Licence holder is provided with a “Green Dog Walkers Tool Kit” which can be used by community groups and volunteer organisations which become an official GDW group.

The philosophy behind the campaign is to change public attitudes so that it becomes socially unacceptable to fail to clean up after your dog which will ultimately result in a reduction in dog fouling across the area.

The secret to a successful GDW campaign is the volunteer groups and dog owners who are the ones “on the ground” running the pledge stalls, gathering pledgers, participating at local dog events, local fairs, setting up in local parks and carrying out surveys to measure the success of the project.

Scottish Borders Council has purchased a Licence and will be working in partnership and supporting community groups to set up and progress their own local GDW group.

Sharing Information and Intelligence

We will work closely with partner agencies to develop and agree protocols for sharing intelligence and other information. This will enable us to make the most effective use of resources by targeting areas affected by dog fouling.

Actions on Information and Intelligence

- **Improve the use of information and intelligence and share this with key partners**
- **Make it easier for members of the public to report instances of dog fouling**
- **Through campaigns, encourage the public’s support in tackling dog fouling and highlight the importance of providing information**
- **Provide regular reports**

Actions on Information and Intelligence Example – Reporting Dog Fouling

Members of the public can report incidents of dog fouling in person, by telephone or online. A recent change to our online reporting form now enables more detailed information to be provided on where the dog fouling occurred (i.e. nearest home or business address or the number of the nearest lamppost). We will share this intelligence with key partners and ensure resources are targeted effectively.

Enforcement

Unfortunately, not all dog owners will respond positively to the responsible dog ownership messages we will communicate. Enforcement therefore has a key role to play in terms of achieving our strategic objectives and is there to support and complement the other themes such as education and awareness and promotional activities and events.

The Council will closely examine all legal duties, powers and provisions i.e. the enforcement tools at its disposal, and will determine not only the appropriateness of each tool, but also the most efficient and effective way to use these including, for example the range of officers from within the Council, external agencies and third parties who may be authorised to take action such as issue of fixed penalty notices.

We will work to ensure that all enforcement is well targeted, effective and fair and will be tough on those who commit serious breaches of the law.

Actions on Enforcement

- **Trial a new targeted approach to enforcement for a 12 month period**
- **Review the number of 'Authorised Officers' across the Council who can issue Fixed Penalty Notices**
- **Carry out a review of enforcement across the Council to make best use of resources**
- **Continue to work with Keep Scotland Beautiful and the Scottish Government to improve the effectiveness of enforcement arrangements**
- **Work with the Procurator Fiscal in bringing successful prosecutions**

Actions on Enforcement Example – Procurator Fiscal

Officers met with the local Procurator Fiscal to discuss the issue of dog fouling in the Scottish Borders and to gauge his willingness to bring such matters to the court. The meeting was very positive. The Fiscal intimated that he certainly would be willing to raise such proceedings, and provided advice on matters such as the quality of evidence which would be needed to secure conviction and the timescales and processes within which such offences would need to be reported.

A key action during 2016/17 will be to progress appropriate cases to the Procurator Fiscal to further support the strong message that failure to deal with dog-fouling will not be tolerated.

Partnerships

As previously stated, effective partnerships have a pivotal role to play in delivering our strategic objectives. We will seek to strengthen existing partnerships with POLICE Scotland, SSPCA, but will also look to establish new and effective partnerships with Community Councils, Youth Groups, Schools, RSLs, Communities, Local Rescue Centres and individuals.

We recognise that a great deal of knowledge, skills and passion exists amongst responsible dog owners and we will seek to harness this energy, making effective use of this previously untapped resource by bringing together communities of interest with a common desire to effect the necessary changes in behaviour and attitudes, making irresponsible dog ownership socially unacceptable.

Action on Partnerships

- **Clarify and raise awareness of the roles and responsibilities of partners**
- **Identify opportunities for Partnership working**

Actions on Partnerships Example – Dog Control Officer

Scottish Borders Council has a Dog Control Officer, whose primary role is assessing whether dogs involved in reported incidents have been out of control, establishing what level of formal intervention is appropriate and monitoring compliance with any Dog Control Notices served. In this role the Dog Control Officer has established working relationships with Police Scotland the SSPCA and the Procurator Fiscals service. The Dog Control Officer is also responsible for making arrangements for stray dogs and works closely with local and national organisations in the kennelling and re-homing of strays. In a wider context the Dog Control Officer has a role in promoting responsible dog ownership. Promotional work can be wide ranging and a number of opportunities will be explored with both local and national partners in this regard.

Resources

Officers from across Scottish Borders Council have a role to play in delivering the objectives of this strategy, including:

- **Neighbourhood Operations – responsible for the Council’s parks, open spaces, footpaths and responding to reports of dog fouling**
- **Regulatory Services – responsible for the investigation of statutory nuisance complaints, enforcement and collection of stray dogs**
- **Legal and Licensing – responsible for the licensing of Animal Boarding establishments and Pet Shops**
- **Safer Communities – responsible for coordinating the multi-agency approach to Anti-Social Behaviour**

Wherever possible, officers will be trained and developed to enable them to respond to a wider range of environmental issues in order to maximize Council resources. Resources will also be flexible to enable a targeted, intelligence-led approach to enforcement.

Performance Monitoring and Review

The effectiveness of the strategy and the progress against the associated Action Plan will be routinely monitored. This will allow the highlighting of successes and will also provide the opportunity of the early identification and review of any areas of concern.

Alternative format/language paragraph

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Contact – Jacqueline Whitelaw, PLACE, Business Support, Scottish Borders Council, Council Headquarters, Newtown St. Boswells, TD6 0SA Tel. No. 0300 100 1800