

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL AUDIT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of Meeting of the AUDIT AND
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held via MS
Teams on Thursday, 19 August 2021 at
10.00 am

Present:- Councillors S. Bell (Chairman), H. Anderson, J. Greenwell, N. Richards (Vice-Chairman), H. Scott and E. Thornton-Nicol

Apologies:- Councillors J. A. Fullarton, E. Robson and S. Scott

In Attendance:- Executive Director (Finance & Regulatory), Principal Regulatory Services Officer – Trading Standards & Animal Health (Bethany Lloyd), Clerk to the Council, Democratic Services Officer (W. Mohieddeen).

1. **MINUTE.**

There had been circulated copies of the Minute of the meeting held on Tuesday, 29 June 2021.

DECISION

APPROVED for signature by the Chairman.

2. **RESPONSIBLE DOG OWNERSHIP STRATEGY REVIEW**

2.1 There had been circulated copies of a presentation on the Responsible Dog Ownership Strategy Review 2018-2022 along with the original Update report and appendices on the Responsible Dog Ownership Strategy & Measures to Control Dog Fouling, which was considered and approved at the meeting of full Council on 31 May 2018. The Principal Regulatory Services Officer – Trading Standards & Animal Health, Ms Lloyd gave the presentation and confirmed that the 2018 recommendations to Council had all been completed. This included securing the supply of dog bags from The Dogs Trust. However, this supply had now ceased due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on The Dogs Trust and a new supplier of dog bags at a low or zero cost was being sought. It was further noted that the post of Information and Education Officer was currently being advertised.

2.2 Ms Lloyd gave details of the progress made on the key objectives of the Strategy. The key objectives outlined were:

- 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.

2.3 Alongside the progress made on the Responsible Dog Ownership Strategy, Ms Lloyd also spoke of the impact of the objectives. Campaign materials aimed at children were

produced as part of the education programme on safe behaviour with dogs and keeping dogs safe. Visits were made to events in communities alongside poster campaigns to promote responsible dog ownership. Work was undertaken with PDSA at community events to provide a free basic health check for dogs. Community events visits were ceased due to the onset of the COVID-19 but work in this objective area led to Scottish Borders Council winning the Dogs Trust Partnership Scheme 2018-19. The legal responsibility of dog owners was highlighted. Where dogs were found not to be under control, Scottish Borders Council's dedicated control officer could enforce relevant legislation to serve a dog control notice including a mandate requiring dogs to be walked on a lead, wear a muzzle or only to be walked in certain areas. It was noted that to support compliance with legislation that Scottish Borders Council had a free programme to implant dog microchips. A stencil and poster campaign was used to pursue a reduction in dog fouling instances. In highlighting work on improving the use of information and intelligence, it was noted that legislation was under review to determine if a dog control database was required. Ms Lloyd added that a new procedure for dog barking complaints had also been introduced. It was noted that there had been a drop in complaints due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. A small proportion of complaints were referred to police due to people not willing to act as a witness or being unable to identify owners.

- 2.4 Members discussed the presentation. In response to questions, Ms Lloyd clarified that dogs were not explicitly banned from certain parks and playing fields, however the Land Reform (Scotland) Act allowed for restrictions to be placed on public access on certain recreational spaces although there was not specific reference to dogs. The Dog Education Officer and the Enforcement Officer were full-time positions. Training could be targeted for certain groups of people which could include staff of Registered Social Landlords if they wished to participate. Members discussed the confidentiality of complaints and noted that the Control of Dogs Act prevented information to be released of sanctions, including to the complainer as they were also protected by the General Data Protection Regulations. Members also discussed the work on responsible dog ownership and communicating progress with Community Councils. The work of Innerleithen Community Council, that had been granted £5,000 to secure 20 bins with dog waste bag dispensers and surveyed the community to determine positions of bins, was highlighted as an example of community involvement. The Community Council had worked with the Council's Neighbourhood Services team to uplift from these additional bins. It was suggested that the Education Officer make contact with Innerleithen Community Council to find out further details if this had not already happened. Ms Lloyd advised that often it was not the siting of bins, but having them emptied which was sometimes an issue. Members also discussed activity in Newtown St Boswells through its Dog Friendly Newtown campaign that had seen an 88% drop in incidences of unlifted dog waste in 3 months. The major issue was the placement of bins and their emptying. Newtown had also provided bio-degradable dog waste bags. It was noted that with The Dogs Trust no longer supplying bags, there was an opportunity to source a supplier of bio-degradable dog bags but funding would need to be found for this, although opportunities to look for partners could also be explored. The Executive Director (Finance & Regulatory) also raised the issue of what happened to dog poo once it was collected, with the current solution to put it into landfill. This was a huge challenge for society and needed to be addressed in a holistic way. Cllr Thornton-Nicol commented on systems whereby poo in biodegradable bags could be composted or used to generate heat for electricity. The Chairman thanked Ms Lloyd for the work carried out on the Strategy and her excellent presentation.

DECISION
AGREED to:

- (a) **request that the Head of Waste Services and Head of Neighbourhood Services attend a future meeting of the Committee to discuss options for the Council on the collection and processing of dog waste;**

- (b) request the Principal Regulatory Services Officer – Trading Standards & Animal Health engage with Registered Social Landlords to discuss training of related issues to responsible dog ownership;
- (c) to request the Principal Regulatory Services Officer – Trading Standards & Animal Health addressed further communication issues with communities, by providing short presentations for Community Councils and Area Partnerships, with a focus on communities and what they could do in partnership on an individual, social and material basis to help prevent dog fouling and establish responsible dog ownership;
- (d) to request the Service Director Young People, Inclusion and Engagement consider how best to raise the issue with children of responsible dog ownership and what material could be provided for schools, perhaps through the Inspire Learning I pads; and
- (e) to endorse the exploration of options for provision of bio-degradable dog bags from a third party supplier.

3. **ANY OTHER SCRUTINY ITEMS WHICH THE CHAIRMAN DECIDES ARE URGENT.**
Councillor Greenwell raised the matter of the Scottish Borders Autism Strategy which had been launched in 2015 and needed to be reviewed to assess its effectiveness and whether this could be included in the Scrutiny Work Programme. Members heard that the Scottish Borders Autism Strategy was owned by the H&SC Integrated Joint Board and not by Scottish Borders Council so may be better reviewed through the Integrated Joint Board and undertook to check on the most appropriate process for a review of the Scottish Borders Autism Strategy. Members were supportive of the Committee reviewing the effectiveness of the Strategy if possible.

DECISION

AGREED that the Clerk to the Council would update the Audit and Scrutiny Committee at its next meeting on an appropriate process to review the Scottish Borders Autism Strategy.

The meeting concluded at 11.25 am