

Public Space Protection Order (Dog Control) Consultation

Summary Report

Introduction

Public Space Protection Orders can be used to regulate activities in particular public places, to ensure that the law-abiding majority can use and enjoy public spaces, safe from anti-social behaviour. A report, presented to the Health Social Care and Well-being Scrutiny Committee on 9th February 2016, outlined proposals to undertake an informal consultation relating to the making of a Public Spaces Protection Order relating to Dog Control.

Health Social Care and Well-being Scrutiny Committee agreed that a 12 week informal consultation would take place to seek residents' views on the following:

- Excluding dogs from all enclosed children's play areas
- Additional requirements for putting dogs on leads at all times in certain areas
- Requiring dogs to be kept on leads in enclosed memorial gardens
- Requiring dog owners to remove dog faeces in public places
- Require dog owners to carry an appropriate receptacle for dealing with the waste that their dogs produce (that is to always have the means to pick their dog faeces)
- Requiring dog owners to put their dogs on a lead when directed to do so by an authorised officer on any public land where the dog is considered to be out of control or causing harm or distress to prevent a nuisance
- Excluding dogs from all council owned marked sports/playing pitches.

Method

The consultation was open to residents and stakeholders for a period of 12 weeks from 1st April to 24th June 2016.

The consultation period was preceded by wide scale communication via the local press and the Council's website, social media accounts and newsletter "Newline". Communication continued through a variety of media throughout the consultation period with a view to raising awareness of the consultation and increasing the response rate.

The key consultation tool was a questionnaire (**Appendix 1**). This was made available bilingually to residents for online completion via the Council's Website and shared on social media. The survey was also provided in paper format at some key Council venues and paper and alternative formats were available on request.

Stakeholder groups were contacted directly via e-mail or in writing and invited to respond to the survey. Those contacted include the Kennel Club, Dogs Trust, RSPCA, Farmers Unions, Horse Society, Open Spaces Society, Ramblers,

Countryside Alliance, Keep Wales Tidy, all sports clubs and societies, Town and Community Councils, the Caerphilly County Borough Viewpoint Panel, 50+ Forum, Parent Network, Welsh speakers, Voluntary Sector, Community Safety Networks and all Head Teachers for the attention of parents. Members of the Youth and Junior Forums as well as young people at Youth Clubs from across the county borough were supported in completing the survey in a workshop setting.

Key Findings

A total of 456 questionnaires were completed online. Eighty-two young people aged 9-11 attended the Junior Forum meeting and eighty-nine 11-20 year olds completed the survey. A number of additional written responses were received from individuals and stakeholders.

Of those who responded to the survey, 92% identified themselves as residents. An Assembly member, a small number of elected members, business people and those representing a charity or organisation plus those who visit the county borough also completed the survey.

65% of those who responded were dog owners.

Dog Fouling

Ninety eight percent of those who responded to the survey agreed with the proposal to continue existing powers that makes it an offence for a person in charge of a dog to fail to clean up its faeces. Youth and Junior Forum views reflected those of the wider public in relation to this proposal.

"All responsible dog owners are already picking up after their dogs, those who do not need to be punished"

"As A Dog Owner I Totally Agree With This, I'm Fed up of other people's dogs fouling outside my house where I clean up after my dog."

Carrying an Appropriate Receptacle

Ninety two percent of respondents agreed with the proposal to introduce a new offence that would require dog walkers to carry an appropriate receptacle for dealing with the waste that their dog/s produce. Again, Youth and Junior Forum views reflected those of the wider public in relation to this proposal. Whilst there was overall agreement, a number felt that this would be difficult to enforce and that more dog waste bins would be required or that bins would need to be emptied more regularly.

"AGREE - However, this will be very difficult to police and/or notice whether they are carrying the bags etc."

"As a dog owner I always carry poop bags for my dog and always have a few spare if others need it. However I think more bins need to be installed within the area and the existing bins need to be cleaned more regularly to encourage people"

Dog Exclusion in Specified Areas

Children's Play Areas

The council is proposing to continue existing power that make it an offence to allow dogs onto all enclosed children's play areas and multi-use games areas within the County Borough. Eighty eight percent of survey respondents agreed with this proposal as did most members of the Youth Forum and Junior Forum.

"it is a children's area, they should be free to run unafraid of dogs or their mess!"

"Not only the hazard of dog mess - some children are scared of dogs and causes distress."

Of those who disagreed, there were a number of comments about ensuring enforcement of legislation and educating irresponsible dog owners.

Sports Pitches

Fifty four percent of those who completed the survey agreed with the proposal to introduce a new requirement that makes it an offence to allow dogs onto all marked sports playing pitches owned by Caerphilly CBC. The proposal was supported by local sports clubs. Youth Forum views reflected those of the wider public in relation to this proposal. The only group where more people disagreed with the proposal than agreed was the Youth Forum.

"A health issue whereby dog faeces on a pitch is dangerous. Dogs and people running, playing sport are not a good mix."

"These sports areas are used by children and adults alike and when using these areas can get their hands or faces in this mess. Have seen dog mess on rugby fields etc!"

"As a local rugby coach for children it's an ongoing problem, not just with dog mess but nuisance dog running into playing/training pitch which can be worrying for both children and parents."

Amongst those in disagreement with the proposal, a number of issues were raised including the lack on an alternative open space for dogs to run off leads, and difficulty enforcing the proposal. The Kennel Club will not support proposals to introduce blanket restriction on dog walkers accessing public open space as dog owners are required to provide their dogs with daily exercise and ask the authority to consider a seasonal restriction to allow dogs to exercise on playing fields when they are not in use. The KC also noted that compliance with such an order can be difficult for a dog walker if there are no boundaries around the playing field as when exercising their dogs off lead, dogs will not recognise the difference between playing fields and other grassed areas. RSPCA Cymru would like to see proper enforcement, using the other powers contained within this PSPO, to target and tackle the dog fouling in these areas and to encourage better dog ownership of offenders.

"Dogs enjoy and require off lead exercise and this would reduce the amount of safe places to do this. With the other measures introduced and controlled properly there should not be any incident of dog fouling on these pitches"

"Rather than punish responsible people that obey rules and care for their animals and the environment, you should concentrate on catching the offenders."

"Most of the enclosed parks where dogs can run free within the town centre also have parts of the ground marked off for sport. It is difficult to stop a dog running onto these areas when off lead."

"If dogs are prohibited from local playing fields, I believe it will cause a substantial breakdown in the community spirit."

Dogs on Leads

Of those who responded to the survey, 92% agreed with the proposal to make it an offence to fail to put a dog on a lead when directed to do so by an authorised officer where the dog is considered to be out of control or causing alarm or distress or to prevent a nuisance. Youth and Junior Forum views reflected those of the wider public in relation to this proposal.

"Agree as even dog is friendly it can be over excited and children can be knocked over"

"All dogs should be under the control of owners wherever they are"

"How is this to be controlled? Are you going to propose hiring sufficient dog wardens to cover the whole county? if not the law will fail and be unenforceable."

Memorial Gardens

The Council's proposal to make it a requirement that dogs are put on leads at all times in enclosed memorial gardens was supported by 91% of survey respondents. Youth and Junior Forum views reflected those of the wider public in relation to this proposal.

"Cannot understand why an owner would be offended by this, seems a responsible thing to do."

"It would be disrespectful to do anything else but have you dog leashed"

Other comments

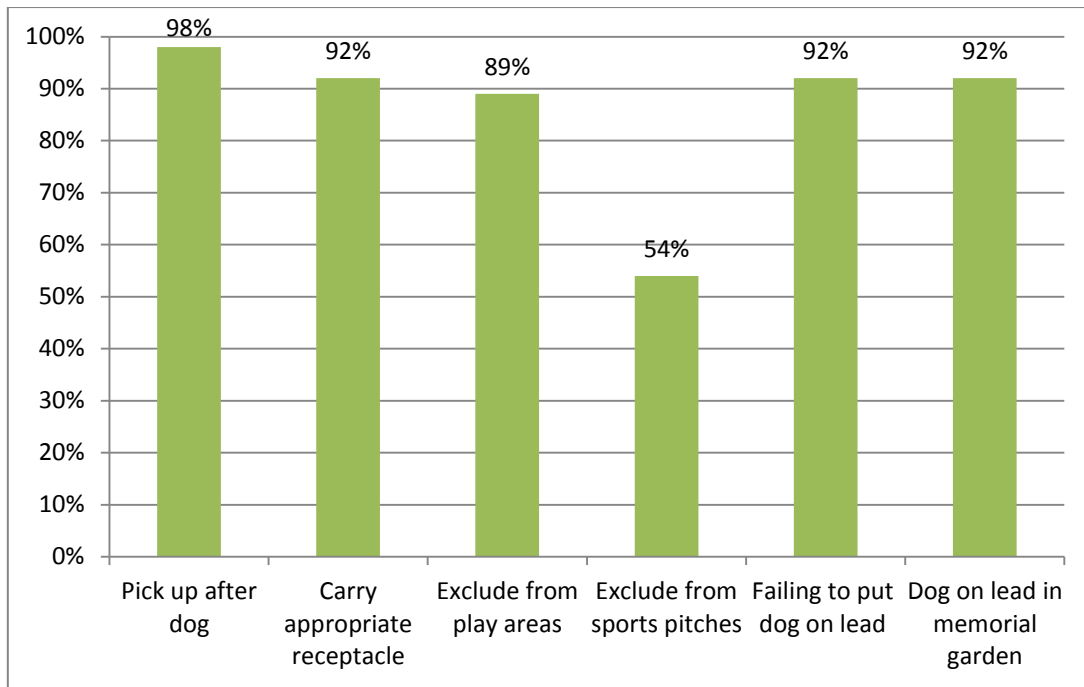
Just over 180 people suggested further areas where they felt the Council should introduce a requirement for dogs to be kept on a lead. A number suggested that areas close to schools, town centres and along canal towpaths should be considered.

Those with physical disabilities and older people with mobility issues raised concerns over restricting their ability to exercise dogs if dogs were not allowed off leads in local parks.

"These proposals do not affect me as such, but could be considered discriminatory against various groups with reduced mobility issues due to placing undue restrictions on where dogs can be exercised."

Summary

There was strong agreement with all of the proposals put forward, with exception of excluding dogs from sports pitches where opinion was divided. Where there was agreement, concerns were raised over resources available for enforcement, without which, any changes to the law could become meaningless.



As highlighted in the graph below, there was a significant difference in the response of dog owners and those who do not own dogs, particularly in relation to excluding dogs from sports pitches.

