



# Northumberland County Council

## **The Communities and Place Overview & Scrutiny Committee**

**Date: 25th July 2018**

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## **The Green Dog Walkers Scheme and Dog Fouling Enforcement**

**Report of the Executive Director of Place:** Paul Johnston

**Cabinet Member for Environment & Local Services:** Councillor Glen Sanderson

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### **Purpose of Report**

The purpose of this report is to update the Committee on the progress of the Green Dog Walker Scheme and also on dog control enforcement in 2017/18.

### **Recommendations**

It is recommended that the Committee:

- 1) receive and comment on the report

### **Link to Corporate Plan**

This report is linked to the Living and Enjoying parts of the Corporate Plan 2018-21 that have the objectives 'We want you to feel safe, healthy, and cared for' and 'We want you to love where you live'.

### **Key Issues**

1. The Green Dog Walkers Scheme is the Council's initiative to promote responsible dog ownership and was launched on the 1st July 2017. Interested members of the public are asked to sign a pledge to become a Green Dog Walker.
2. Green Dog Walkers pledge to always clean up after their dog and dispose of the bag in a bin, and when walking their dog to wear the Green Dog Walker armband,

offer free dog bags to encourage others, hand out leaflets and at all times adopt a non-confrontational and friendly approach to changing attitudes about dog fouling.

3. The numbers of pledgers has far exceeded officer's expectations. By June 2018 1,239 Green Dog Walkers were signed up to the scheme. Durham County Council have been running a similar scheme since 2011 and they currently have 1600 members. So our numbers are very encouraging given that the scheme is only a year old. The scheme has also been actively supported by many town & parish councils across Northumberland.
4. The scheme has already yielded measurable benefits. Since the scheme started there has been a 26% reduction in the number of dog fouling complaints received by the Council. Because fewer complaints need a response this has allowed more proactive dog fouling enforcement patrolling to be carried out in 2018 and also more work carried out in support of the scheme.
5. There are many Green Dog Walker events organised for 2018 including a number of Green Dog Walker doggie walks. These have been organised in partnership with local town and parish councils. Green dog walkers are invited to a doggie walk but they are also provided with a free micro chipping check. So far the events at Newbiggin, Cramlington and Alwick have resulted in 44 new Green Dog Walkers signing up to the scheme.
6. The Green Dog Walkers Scheme is one part of an overall approach by the Council to tackle dog fouling that utilises the three 'E's: engagement, education, and enforcement. With regard to education the Council's animal welfare officers visit schools during the school year and talk to children about responsible dog ownership.
7. With regard to enforcement a new fines structure was adopted by the Council on the 10th January 2017 that meant that for the first time fines in Northumberland for dog control offences are at the statutory maximum. Enforcement officers target hot spot areas identified through complaint levels, reports from local parishes and data from enforcement patrols/environmental surveys.
8. In 2017/18 a total of 85 fixed penalty fines were issued in Northumberland for dog fouling. Benchmarking has shown that this was the highest number issued by any of the seven North East Councils last year.

## **BACKGROUND**

### **1. Dog fouling and public health.**

**1.1** Dog fouling is not only a problem for the quality of the environment but it also presents a significant public health risk. In particular it can lead to toxocariasis in humans.

**1.2** Toxocariasis causes serious illness and even blindness. It is caused by a parasite known as *Toxocara Canis* (also known as Roundworm). These parasites live in dogs' digestive systems. Eggs are released in the faeces of infected animals and contaminated soil. If someone ingests infected material, the eggs may hatch into larvae and can lead to toxocariasis.

**1.3** Toxocariasis usually affects children aged between one and four years. But cases of toxocariasis have been reported in people of all ages. Young children are most at risk because they are more likely to put things into their mouths and less likely to wash their hands properly. Symptoms of toxocariasis can include seizures, breathing difficulties, a very red and painful eye, and clouded vision, usually only in one eye. Left untreated, toxocariasis can cause permanent loss of vision in the affected eye.

**1.4** Because of the public health risks the Council has adopted a zero tolerance approach to dog fouling since 2012 . Any person observed allowing their dog to foul without immediately picking up is (if a first time offender) issued with a fixed penalty notice. This requires the payment within 14 days but if the offender does not pay the fine or is a second time offender then the council would prosecute through the courts who can award a fine up to £1000.

### **2 Green Dog Walkers.**

**2.1** This scheme was initially developed by Falkirk Council but has now been used under licence by over 30 councils including a number from the North East. Under licence the Council can use tried and tested promotional materials that it can "badge" to Northumberland County Council.

**2.2** 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 hopefully, will ultimately result in a reduction in dog fouling across the area. A survey on dog fouling and the scheme across Falkirk Council, showed that 52% of the surveyed (dog owners and general public) had heard of the campaign and know what it stands for; 49% felt the campaign helped bring attention to the dog fouling situation; 69% talked to their family and friends about the campaign; and of those who had taken the pledge, 89.7% felt that signing the pledge made them more conscious about cleaning up; 44% of pledgers believe that when other

dog walkers see them wearing the armband, they are less likely to leave dog fouling in their presence.

**2.3** The scheme relies on partnership working between the Council and GDW members. It uses a non-confrontational approach to encourage responsible dog ownership. Talking to dog walkers, offering free poop bags and in turn encouraging them to also sign up to the green dog walker pledge.

**2.4** Those who sign up to be a Green Dog Walker pledge:

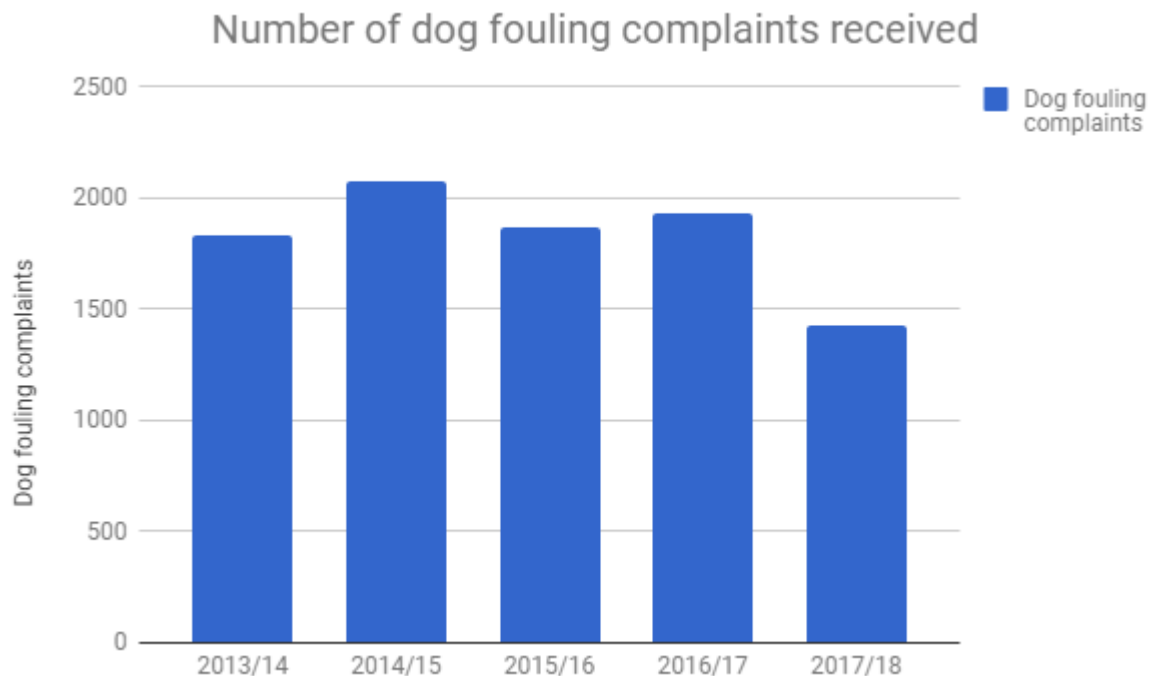
1. I will wear the armband as often as possible when walking my dog(s).
2. I will at all times clean up after my dog and dispose of the bag in a bin.
3. When others walk my dog I will encourage them to clean up after my dog.
4. I understand that wearing the armband indicates that I will carry extra doggie bags to distribute to other dog walkers if requested.
5. At no time when wearing the armband will I aggressively confront other dog walkers about dog fouling. I fully understand that Green Dog Walkers® is intended to be a non-confrontational and friendly campaign to change attitudes about dog fouling.
6. I agree that Green Dog Walkers® may contact me to take part in questionnaires or surveys regarding my Green Dog Walker® experience, to help judge the success of the project.

**2.5** Green Dog Walker support kits are provided to each Green Dog Walker. They are supplied with a Green Dog Walker guide that includes ideas for organising their own events together with leaflets, armbands and a supply of Green Dog Walker poop bags. The costs of materials has been met from within existing budget.

**2.6 Engagement with the Northumberland Coast AONB Partnership.** Officers are engaged with the Northumberland Coast AONB Partnership to address key dog control issues impacting on coastal parishes particularly but not exclusively on and around beaches. Additional messages on responsible dog walking for this part of the campaign include an emphasis on the responsibility for keeping a dog under control at all times because of: the disturbance to roosting and feeding birds, the disturbance to breeding birds, the worrying of farm animals, dogs & stranded seals.

**2.7 Green Dog Walker Events 2018.** As well as educational visits to schools a number of Green dog Walker events have been organised in partnership with town and parish councils. These take the form of Green Dog Walks together with free dog microchipping check ups and will be occurring through 2018. So far there have been events at Newbiggin, Cramlington and Alnwick, with planned events organised for Haltwhistle, Blyth, Prudhoe, Cambois, Berwick and Hexham.

**2.7 The Impact of Green Dog Walkers.** Since the introduction of Green Dog Walkers there has been the first significant drop in dog fouling complaints in the last five years. While it cannot be categorically asserted this is due to the scheme it would be reasonable to conclude that this cannot be just coincidence. When comparing 2016/17 to 2017/18 the reduction has been 26%.



### 3 Dog Fouling Enforcement

**3.1 The Northumberland County Council (Dog Control) Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO)** has replaced previous dog control orders and came into force on the 30th January 2017. A new fixed penalty notices policy adopted on the 10th January 2017 means that the penalty for dog fouling & dog control offences has increased to the statutory maximum i.e. from £75 to £100 (reduced to £80 if paid within 7 days).

**3.1.1** The first schedule of the PSPO makes it an offence to allow your dog to foul publicly accessible land in Northumberland without picking up immediately. This applies to any land within the administrative county of Northumberland which is open to the air and to which the public are entitled or permitted to have access to (with or without payment) including any land which is covered but which is open to the air on at least one side.

**3.1.2** The second schedule is the only one that does not cover all of Northumberland because it specifies exclusion zones. It excludes all dogs from enclosed children's play areas within the administrative county of Northumberland and parts of two beaches at

Blyth & Newbiggin have seasonal bans running from May through to the end of September each year.

**3.1.3** The third schedule requires dogs to be on a lead in all graveyards or memorial gardens in Northumberland at all times and any land within the administrative county of Northumberland which is a designated carriageway (A or B classified roads) together with the adjoining footpaths and verges of such carriageways.

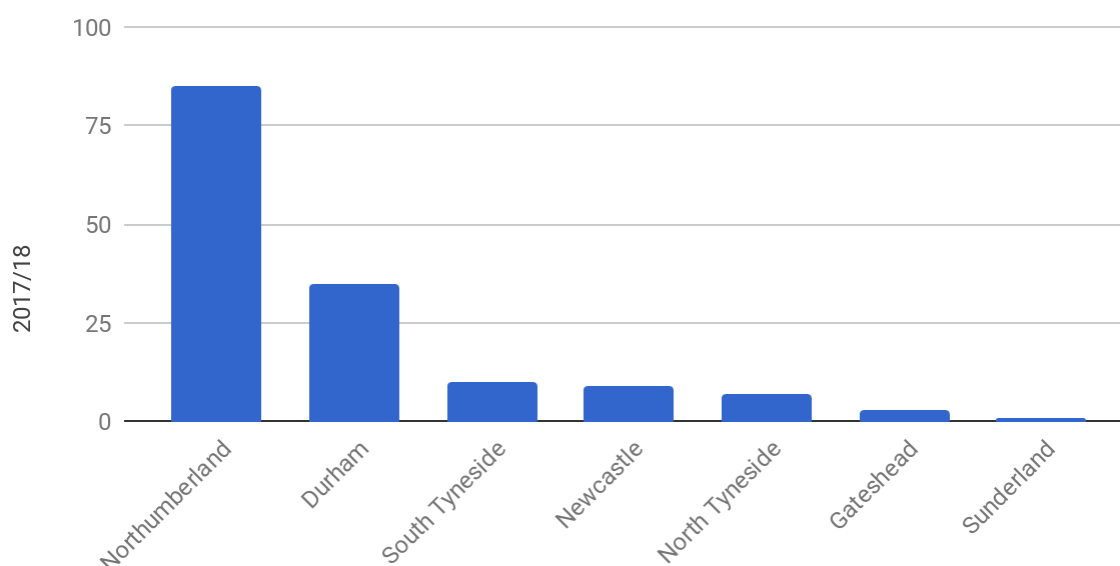
**3.1.4** The fourth requires when instructed by an authorised officer of the Council to put a dog on a lead for reasons of public safety then the person must do so.

### **3.2 Dog fouling enforcement - outcomes**

**3.2.1** In 2017/18 the Environmental Enforcement and Animal Welfare Team issued a total of 85 fixed penalty notices for dog fouling. This is a decrease of 14% when compared to 17/18. However the number of enforcement patrolling has not decreased. Additionally 2 offenders were prosecuted for non-payment of fixed penalties and the South East Northumberland Magistrates court issued fines of £55 and £110 respectively.

**3.2.2** The chart below shows a comparison of the number of dog fouling FPNs served in Northumberland and those in the other six North East council areas. This information was received in response to formal freedom of information requests made to each council. The benchmarked data shows that in 17/18 Northumberland County Council issued significantly more fixed penalty notices than any of the other NE councils.

**Number of dog fouling fixed penalty notices issued by NE Councils  
2017/18**



**3.2.3** Comparison of the 17/18 benchmarked data to previous years shows that for most of the NE councils there has been a significant decline in the numbers of FPNs issued for dog fouling over the last four years. In Northumberland by contrast, however, numbers have been maintained at comparable levels to previous years.

**3.2.4** The fines collected are used to pay for the annual publication of a Rescued Dogs Calendar. All the proceeds raised from the sale of the calendar are given as charitable donations to four dog charities active in Northumberland. In 2017 the charities were: The Dogs Trust, S.H.A.K (based in Alnwick), B.A.R.K (based in Berwick) and Alexa's Animals (based near North Charlton).

## BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

## IMPLICATIONS ARISING OUT OF THE REPORT

### *Give the implications*

Policy: None

Finance and value for money: Costs are met from existing budgets

Human Resources: None

Property: None

Equalities(Impact Assessment attached) The implementation of the campaign does not present potentially significant equality issues.

Yes  No  N/A

Risk Assessment: None

Crime & Disorder: The campaign promotes responsible dog ownership so should reduce dog related offences

Customer Considerations: The campaign is delivered in such a way as to ensure that a consistent and proportionate approach is taken in all circumstances.

Carbon Reduction: None

Consultation: None

Wards: All



**Report sign off.**

***Authors must ensure that relevant officers and members have agreed the content of the report:***

Finance Officer	AM
Monitoring Officer/Legal	NM
Human Resources	n/a
Procurement	n/a
I.T.	n/a
Portfolio Holder(s)	GS

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