

STRONG AND SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE	Agenda Item No. 7
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Report of the Senior Neighbourhood Enforcement Officer

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RESPONSIBLE DOG OWNERSHIP

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 The issue of dog control is a national issue at present. A number of consultations have taken place nationally to consider amendments to the current legislation to control dogs. With this in mind, and to very much complement any changes in the law, officers have been developing a programme to raise awareness with pet owners on how they can do more to ensure they and their animal behave appropriately when in public and at home.

This report sets out details about this programme.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the committee support a programme that promotes responsible dog ownership, including hosting and/or facilitating events with partner agencies, initially over a pilot 12 month period.
- 2.2 Further, that the committee support officers to continue to work with the Police as new powers are introduced that enable better controls of dangerous dogs in order to maximise the impacts of both organisations.

3. LINKS TO THE SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY

- 3.1 Achieving responsible dog ownership in our communities makes a significant difference to the wellbeing and safety of our residents, and the environmental conditions within which they live. Dog walking in a safe clean environment is also a healthy activity contributing to improving the health of our population. This report therefore contributes across the whole Sustainable Community Strategy, and directly towards the aims of creating strong and supportive communities and to achieving our environmental ambitions.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 At the September 2010 Peterborough North Neighbourhood Committee meeting information was requested to inform a debate around whether or not Dog Control Orders would be appropriate and relevant for the Werrington area. Since then discussions have been held in other areas across the city. Throughout these discussions concerns were raised regarding the behaviour of dogs that were allowed by their owners to run around off the lead, as well as the behaviour of some owners who were not picking up the fouling left by their pet.
- 4.2 In November 2011 the Strong and Supportive Communities Scrutiny Committee was asked to debate the issue of Dog Control Orders in Peterborough. During the debate and through the evidence gathering process it was found that no programme of education had been undertaken or facilitated by the Local Authority in some time and it was agreed that this was an avenue that should be explored. Without the Local Authority trying to raise awareness on this topic Dog Control Orders can not be implemented.

- 4.3 The report that was discussed at the November 2011 Committee meeting outlined the lengthy process involved in installing Dog Control Orders and the costs involved in doing so. The report also indicated that there would be a requirement to employ a staff member whose role would be to install and then police the orders.
- 4.4 Peterborough City Council has a responsibility to deal with Stray Dogs and Dog Fouling only. There is no legal definition of a stray dog; however, the Council considers that a dog may reasonably be treated as a stray if it is roaming freely and not under the control of any person, irrespective of whether it has a home. Powers under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 give the Council the authority to seize and detain a dog. In order for the owner to reclaim the dog they must pay a fine and any kenneling and vets fees.
- 4.5 Dog Fouling is currently dealt with under the Dogs (Fouling of Land) Act 1996. This power is delegated to the Neighbourhood Officers. They patrol known hotspot locations, and owners seen to allow their dog to foul and not clear up are liable to a Fixed Penalty Notice of £50. The officers are also acting as a deterrent whilst they are in the parks.
- 4.6 The Dangerous Dog Act 1991 is a power exercised by the Police only. This act enables restrictions to be imposed in relation to dogs which present a serious danger to the public and to make further provision for ensuring that dogs are kept under proper control. The act was mainly introduced to help the Police deal with breeds, such as Pitbulls, that are bred for fighting.

5. KEY ISSUES

- 5.1 Since the previous Scrutiny Committee a number of actions have been delivered to help improve the information supply to the residents of the city. A number of contacts have been developed also with a view to sustained education provision in the city.
- 5.1.1 **Web Page** – The Peterborough City Council website has been updated and now has a web page dedicated to providing information to residents. The page is entitled '**Controlling Your Dog**' and can be found in the Community Information section of the website. It contains information on 12 basic points that dog owners must have regard for.

In order to achieve this a relationship has been formed with a local celebrity Dog Trainer, Karen Wild. Karen is a regular columnist for Dogs Today magazine and is often on local radio stations offering her advice. Karen kindly took the time to provide the content for this web page. Furthermore Karen has agreed to put her contact details onto the website should readers of the web page feel that more advice would be beneficial. Peterborough City Council doesn't employ an expert in animal behaviour and Karen's advice in these areas will assist us to raise awareness in the area.

- 5.1.2 **Roadshow** – A roadshow event took place on 24 August 2012 in Central Park and was attended by Wood Green, the Peterborough City Council Dog Warden, Police, dog trainers and dog groomers. This date was chosen as it was in the school summer holidays and another event was taking place in Central Park on that day by Axiom Housing Association. It was believed that as a result of these factors there would be a good number of people passing through the Park.

To promote the event further a press release was also sent out in the weeks running up to the event, and posters were emailed to interested groups and associations to display in community centres and notice boards. Posters were also sent to as many local veterinary surgeries as possible with covering letters asking for support.

At the event advice was offered to pet owners on how pets and particularly dogs should behave in public. The advice was to raise awareness with dog walkers that not everybody likes to be approached by dogs; owners should therefore be sure they have good 'recall' over their dog i.e. it returns to its owner when instructed, before allowing it to run off a lead.

There was an agility ring which was made available by a local dog trainer. Within the agility ring owners and their dogs had the opportunity to experience the agility course. Wood Green held a 'School for Dogs' at which owners and their dogs were offered help and advice on behaviour and obedience in the confines of an enclosure.

The Hearing Dogs charity was also present, and they brought along puppies for the public to meet and greet. It was an opportunity for them to fund raise and the puppies were an ideal draw encouraging people to access other information available.

This road show was a success and it is proposed that it will be used as a blueprint for similar events in parks elsewhere across the city.

- 5.1.3 **Wood Green** – Wood Green used the event as a springboard to heightened levels of proactive work in Peterborough. The event has helped to raise Wood Green's profile in Peterborough helping them to interact more effectively with residents. They have confirmed that Peterborough is a priority location for their work primarily to offer assistance to those households struggling with pets.

Wood Green have also indicated that they would like to run educational programmes in local schools.

- 5.2 **FUTURE PLANS** – The roadshow event has produced a good level of interest from local dog trainer groups and they have offered their services for any future events or programmes that may take place. They have indicated they have a local interest and client base that may help promote future events even further.

Once feedback has been received from all partners it will be assessed to determine just how effective the event has been, e.g. has there been a reduction in the number of calls received by the Police regarding dangerous dogs.

6. IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are some costs involved in delivering the pilot programme, but these can be met from existing resources. This demonstrates good value for money because of the anticipated savings that should be achieved by not having to enforce against irresponsible dog ownership and through reduced clean-up costs. Costs will be kept to a minimum by also taking up offers of support from partners and service providers who see a benefit to working with us on this initiative.
- 6.2 Changes to national legislation may emerge as government conclude their work, and these will be factored in to our policies and procedures as necessary.

7. CONSULTATION

- 7.1 Prior to this report coming to committee, the subject of responsible dog ownership has been discussed and presented to a previous Strong and Supportive Communities Scrutiny Committee meeting and prior to that to the Peterborough North Neighbourhood Committee.
- 7.2 It is proposed that an education and awareness raising programme is piloted for 12 months, during which time consultation will take place with trainers, owners, partner agencies and communities to help determine its effectiveness and forward strategy.

8. NEXT STEPS

If the committee make the recommendation to run a pilot programme, officers will develop the detail in consultation with local councillors and Neighbourhood Committees. It is suggested that a follow-up report comes back to committee during 2013/14 to assess the impact and effectiveness of the pilot.

9. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Used to prepare this report, in accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

None

10. APPENDICES

None