

# RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL REPORT TO HEALTH & HOUSING COMMITTEE

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Agenda Item No.

meeting date: 30 MAY 2013  
title: DEFINING FUTURE DOG FOULING STRATEGY BASED ON BEST PRACTICE  
submitted by: CHIEF EXECUTIVE  
principal author: JAMES RUSSELL, HEAD OF ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

## 1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To review and inform Committee of current best practice in relation to dog fouling.
- 1.2 Relevance to the Council's ambitions and priorities:
  - Council Ambitions – to make people's lives safer and healthier, and to protect and enhance the existing environmental quality of the area.

## 2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Dog fouling continues to be an important and emotive issue to many Ribble Valley residents and is a subject which results in being one of the main causes of complaint to the Council. Naturally, many people have a very low or zero tolerance to dog fouling which means finding an acceptable permanent solution is very difficult to achieve.
- 2.2 Nationally, 71% of Councils reported dog fouling being a major concern, with the remaining 29% recording it as a minor concern.
- 2.3 Dog Warden enforcement has been reviewed periodically in reports to Community Committee on 7 March 2000 and further reports to the Council's Community Committee on 16 January 2007 and Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 20 February 2007. In addition ongoing activity is reported regularly contained within the Chief Executives General Report to this Committee.
- 2.4 In addition, in July 2011, members of Community Committee received a report outlining longstanding problems of dog fouling on Council playing pitches. A further report is to be presented to Community Committee on 21<sup>st</sup> May 2013 recommending the introduction of new Dog Control Orders under the Clean Neighbourhood & Environment Act 2005, to provide enhanced powers to tackle the following dog control issues; extending dog fouling 'removal' provisions, exclusion from designated areas, control of dogs in public areas;
- 2.5 It was agreed that officers should pursue a change to the current order to include a dog ban on Council Playing Fields, alongside other measures and that Parishes should be consulted to determine any changes they might like to see.
- 2.6 A report was duly submitted to Parish Council Liaison Committee in November 2012, asking Parishes to review their own areas and suggest any amendments.

## 3 CURRENT SITUATION

- 3.1 According to nationally quoted statistics, in 2010 in the UK, there were estimated to be between 8 and 10.5 million dogs with an average of 26% of households owning a dog. With approximately 24,000 households in Ribble Valley, this suggests in excess

of 6000 dogs are currently resident within the borough, this figure does not take into account those accompanying visitors.

- 3.2 Recognising this considerable number of dogs being resident within the Ribble Valley and the relatively low incidences of severe dog fouling, means that it should be recognised that we have a high proportion of responsible and considerate dog owners, due to the limited number of problem hot spots that we are required to deal with.
- 3.3 Tackling dog fouling has been an issue that has taxed local authorities for many years, probably since local authorities were made responsible for dealing with packs of stray dogs in the 1980's.
- 3.4 The Council's Dog warden service has experienced a significant increase in complaints in relation to all areas of responsibility and now receives over 200 dog fouling complaints per year, double that of 2005.

	<b>2005/6</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012/13</b>
• Stray Dogs	19	31	17
• Lost Dogs	10	75	65
• Barking Dogs	29	84	96
• Dog Fouling	101	156	212

- 3.5 Unfortunately, in the order of half to two thirds of complaints continue to relate to single intermittent occurrences, which, by their nature are impossible to trace and resolve satisfactorily. As reported previously, many residents are reluctant to become involved and report neighbours and provide witness statements to enable enforcement action.
- 3.6 It must also be remembered that Central Government has prohibited the use of surveillance cameras as being disproportionate to the offence and also made undertaking covert surveillance considerably more complex to obtain the requisite permissions, in relation to apprehending dog foulers, even though this view is not representative of current public opinion.

#### **4 ISSUES**

- 4.1 Considerable research and evaluation has been undertaken by the 'Keep Britain Tidy Group' into the complexities of dog fouling, who have produced a number of Best Practice references.
- 4.2 The Keep Britain Tidy Group has recorded a reduction in overall levels of dog fouling since 2001/2, however it is a significant cause of offence amongst the public
- 4.3 In addition, dog fouling is not only unpleasant but dangerous. The biggest threat to public health from dog excrement being Toxocariasis, an infection of the dog round worm, the eggs of which can be found in soil and sand contaminated with dog faeces and if swallowed, can result in infection that lasts between 6 and 24 months. Eye disorders are the most commonly reported complaint associated with Toxocariasis. Other symptoms can include, vague ache, dizziness, nausea, asthma and in rare cases, seizures and fits. Infected soil samples are often found in play areas and as a result, Toxocariasis most commonly affects children between 18 months and 5 years and can cause blindness. A recent case in Manchester has attracted considerable media interest and shows that it is not as rare as some people may wish to believe. Often eggs are ingested when passed from hand to mouth, however, infection can also occur through contact with dogs or inanimate objects, including wheels of toys, soles of shoes, etc.

#### 4.4 Headline Facts & Figures;

- Estimates suggest the dog population produces in the order of 1,000 tonnes of excrement daily;
- Dog Faeces can take up to 2 months to break down – it has the potential to accumulate on a site in certain conditions;
- A single dog mess can contain approximately 1 million microscopic eggs;
- 54% of dog owners have neither bought nor used wormers for their dog;
- Random soil samples have shown that the majority of parks in the UK are contaminated with toxocara eggs;
- Toxocara eggs are resistant to freezing and disinfectants and can survive for 2 years or more
- Toxocara eggs are not infectious until they embryonate. This is usually 2-3 weeks after being deposited by a dog. Therefore recently deposited faeces are not infectious and can safely be cleared if done immediately;
- Typically 100 cases are diagnosed each year, with 50 suffering serious eye damage (nearly all being toddlers);
- There are no useful treatments or cure;
- About half of the most serious cases occur in families who have never owned a dog or cat;
- Toxocara worms vary between 2cm and 10 cm in length, although they tend to coil up when expelled;
- Dog walkers typically visit the same site more than once per week;
- Fining people for not picking up dog waste was reported to only put 7% of people off visiting a site;
- Most common method of disposal of bagged dog waste, 61% utilise specific dog waste bins, whilst only 13% use standard litter bins;
- 93% of survey respondents 'always' picked up after their dogs fouled on or near paved areas or paths;
- 86% of survey respondents picked up after their dogs if anybody was close by/watching or where dog faeces could be seen;
- 20% of respondents confessed to bagging dog waste but not placing it in a bin
- Dogs normally defecate within 10 minutes of commencing a walk;
- Most faeces are deposited within 1 metre of a path;
- Only 10% of dog walkers in the countryside keep their dogs on lead at all times, with 11% say they never have on lead;
- Dog fouling rated as most problematic local environmental quality issue in 2009;
- The Government recommend that there should be 1 dog warden per 50,000 population;

On a more positive note;

- Dogs contribute towards a healthier, more inclusive society encouraging more active lifestyles and reducing stress through taking regular walks;
- Dog walking is the main reason for visits to open access land (countryside)
- From the sales of their food alone, dogs are worth around £1 billion to the UK economy;
- There are over 1,000 Kennel Club Good Citizen Training Clubs across the UK, helping over 80,000 owners to have happy, healthy and sociable pets

4.5 Keep Britain Tidy believe that it is a small minority of dog owners who still fail to clean up after their pets, with highest levels of fouling found in residential areas (low density social housing: 13%) and those traditionally associated with dog walking (highways: 15%, public open spaces: 14%, inland waterways: 16%).

4.6 Using a wide ranging number of surveys during 2001/2, Keep Britain Tidy believe they have identified the behavioural traits of dog foulers. This profile is a generalisation, however, the same comments and attitudes are often quoted by irresponsible dog owners;

- Dog foulers would clear up after their dogs if they were shaken or shocked into it;
- Dog foulers classified as “Justifiers’ as they justify their behaviour largely on grounds that they didn’t know what to do, and that everyone else is doing it!; typical quotes include; “ what do you want me to do ?”, “ if you have a dog it has to go somewhere!”, “ everyone else is doing it, so why not me? “, “ you can’t be watching your dog all the time!”
- ‘Justifiers’ are more likely to be
  - male than female;
  - found across all age groups; - slightly higher proportion between 18 & 24
  - from all social classes;
  - admit they allow their dog to foul in a public place when pressed;
  - all know they could be fined, majority believe they never will;
- typical quotes include;
  - “It could be £50,000 ( the fine) but who enforces it ?”
  - “I doubt it ( being fined ) would ever happen”
  - “I don’t know anybody who has been fined”

4.7 There is no single simple solution to dog fouling. It requires a multi-faceted approach and will require a balance of;

- Targeted high profile public awareness campaigns – informed dog owners and public;
- Appropriate legislation and control orders;
- Credible enforcement, high profile and ‘out of hours’ patrols, proportionate reporting of offenders;
- Ready availability of disposal facilities – dedicated and non dedicated dog waste bins
- Education of future dog owners
- Signage

4.8 Measures already in hand;

- Undertake targeted high profile patrols – including Out of Hours
- Adopt new enhanced Dog Control orders applicable to more sites
- Installed and maintain + 100 dedicated dog waste bins
- Undertake educational awareness campaigns – currently 3 per year
- Regular dog fouling articles in Ribble Valley Newspaper
- Exchange best practice pan Lancashire

4.9 Potential additional measures

- Publish high profile detailed article in next edition of Ribble Valley news outlining new controls and stating clear and unequivocal message – ‘ **You must always clean up after your dog – every time, every where**’ and promote public health implications ‘**ensure your dog is regularly wormed**’ etc.
- Lancashire authority wide co-ordinated campaign – seek input from Public Health England and Liverpool Vet Centre on health implications;
- Promote that specifically ‘selected’ litter bins can be used for bagged dog waste – (not to include those in town/village centres, near shops, public seating or bus stops) and sign accordingly;
- Review and rationalise the number of dog waste bins and litter bins to reduce duplication and thereby release additional resource where possible for enforcement (currently 1 day per week of Dog Warden time used to empty dog waste bins, similar for amenity cleansing).

- Guidance suggests authorities should employ 1 Dog Warden per 50,000 population, being equivalent to 1.2 FTE in Ribble Valley, we currently have 0.8 FTE available.
- Develop and introduce new signs with clear messages concerning dog fouling for dog waste bins, selected litter bins, road signage etc

## 5 **RECOMMENDED THAT COMMITTEE**

### 5.1 Note the content of the report

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For further information, please ask for James Russell 01200 414466

### BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 1) Dog Fouling and the Law ENCAMS/Keep Britain Tidy group
- 2) ENCAMS @ On the Ground – Facts & Figures)
- 3) Cleaning up the Act –Keep Britain Tidy/UNISON
- 4) Web link: <http://www.keepbritaintidy.org/KeyIssues/DogFouling/Default.aspx>