



Dog Fouling – Why it is difficult to tackle and potential solutions

To: All Chief Executives, Main Contacts and APSE Contacts in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

Key Points

In 3 years since the original APSE [briefing](#), dog fouling remains one of the most prevalent issues for local authority environmental services.

This briefing covers why this issue is so difficult to tackle, and offers some additional solutions for local authorities.

1.0 Background

As shown in the recent APSE State of the Market report for Parks and Green Spaces, dog fouling remains the second priority environmental issue for that service (83%) behind only litter (89%), and the figure is up by 5% since last year's survey. 66% have dog control orders in parks and green spaces, which is also up by 4% since last year. According to respondents from the APSE State of the Market for Street Cleansing, 80% are planning dog fouling education campaigns in the next 2 years, which is also up by 12.4% since last year.

This shows that dog fouling is a prevailing problem for many local authorities, and with shrinking staff levels and diminishing budgets, it will become more difficult for local authorities to deal with in the way that they do currently.

2.0 Why dog fouling is a challenging issue to tackle

Dog fouling seems particularly difficult to tackle for a number of reasons:

People are aware they could be fined, but many don't think they will ever be caught

Research by [Encams](#) showed that roughly 60% of dog owners who justify their behaviour largely on the idea that "everyone else is doing it" would clean up after their pets if they were either shaken or shocked into it, and if the dangers of toxocariasis was better articulated.

Fouling can happen at any time of day or night, so patrolling often won't catch the offenders

Research by [Keep Britain Tidy](#) showed that people are more likely to not pick up after their dogs when they feel like they aren't being watched (either by the public or by enforcement officers/contractors); fouling also has been shown to increase at night.

Residents are (rightfully) hesitant to confront residents who persistently dog foul

Offenders can react in a myriad of ways to being confronted, ranging from excuses about not having bags to collect the waste all the way up to violent altercations. Recent news stories suggest that an elderly man in [North Ayrshire](#) was punched for confronting a man, and another in [Huddersfield](#) was subjected to racial abuse and threats of violence.

It is important to let residents know about the potential dangers of confronting or recording offenders.

Prosecution requires good evidence

Residents often only report where the dog fouling is, rather than giving a date, time, name and address of the dog owner (if known), a description of the dog and owner, vehicle registration number, and any other identifying details that could lead to a successful prosecution. A [Chorley Council councillor](#) also suggested that residents with doorstep CCTV cameras could provide footage of someone not picking up after their pet to officers.

It can be a long and time-consuming process to pursue and successfully prosecute offenders.

As a result of residents only reporting where dog fouling has taken place and the way that local authorities record incident reporting, many Freedom of Information requests that have been reported in the news media comparing number of reports to number of prosecutions have unfairly made local authorities look very ineffective at tackling dog fouling.

Attempts to introduce new dog controls to combat dog fouling can lead to a public backlash

[Wirral Council](#) recently proposed introducing a Public Spaces Protection order that would require dog owners to carry bags as well as banning dog walking between May and September at tourist hotspots, as well as bans from marked sports pitches and children's play areas, and requiring dogs to be on a lead at all times in other areas. This approach was met by a considerable public backlash, with a [petition](#) reaching nearly 20,000 signatures; many of the comments saw the proposals as an attack on responsible dog ownership.

The same story is also true of many other local authorities, and shows how difficult it can be to try and introduce effective controls on irresponsible owners that do not negatively impact responsible owners.

The public is still largely unaware that (in many areas) you can dispose of dog waste in any available local authority litter bin

Many residents are still under the impression that you must use the dog waste bins only, but guidance on this has since been updated and the majority of councils now encourage owners that they can use any general litter bin. More work should be done to educate the public on this in areas where dog fouling issues exist where there are few bins specifically for dog waste.

Many people don't consider leaving dog waste bags on the ground fouling

The littering of bagged dog waste is a growing problem. Research by the [Dog's Trust and Keep Britain Tidy](#) showed that many dog walkers leave bagged dog waste in public places with the intention of collecting it later but forget, and that this may be suggesting to others that it is a "socially acceptable practice". Some councils are now including messages about bagged waste into their education and enforcement campaigns, with some like [Cornwall Council](#) offering a £150 fixed penalty or prosecution for those caught throwing it.

3.0 Good ideas from local authorities

Local authorities are implementing many good ideas related to dog fouling that could be easily implemented by others. The [2016 APSE briefing](#) covered ideas such as:

- The Green Dog Walkers Scheme
- Rewards for residents reporting fouling
- Chalk stencils with messages being painted onto pavements
- Highlighting fouling with bright coloured sprays
- Hanging bags of soil to represent fouling in the area
- Glow-in-the-dark posters to target night-time fouling
- Dog watch schemes – inspired by neighbourhood watch schemes
- A Council reporting app that allows you to identify the location of fouling

Dog bag dispensers

Dog bag dispensers - Getting primary schools involved - West Lothian Council [\[link\]](#)

West Lothian Council's Cleaner communities team engaged with local primary schools to create dog bag dispensers from empty two litre plastic bottles. Parkhead Primary in West Calder took part, and the bag dispensers were placed at key points in the local area.

Dog bag dispensers – Provided free of charge through sponsorship - Fife Council [\[link\]](#)

Fife installed free dog bag dispensers across parks, recreation areas and walking routes in the authority. Fife teamed up with an organisation called Tikspac UK who provide the dispensers and unlimited bags, with the costs covered through sponsorship and advertising on the dispensers; therefore, all the council have to do is re-fill the dispensers.

A survey of council areas where these stations have been installed has shown an average 56.8% reduction in dog fouling complaints and 49.4% average reduction in littering.

Dog walking routes intervention in 15 local parks – Dogs Trust and Keep Britain Tidy [\[link\]](#)

The Dogs Trust and Keep Britain Tidy's 'Walk This Way' campaign uses signage, colour-coded route markers and bin stickers to create dog walking routes with bins for waste disposal. Route markers are shown at 200 metre intervals, with stickered bins placed at 1-kilometre intervals. Maps of the routes were also displayed. The use of these dog walking routes reduced bagged and unbagged dog fouling by an average of 40% across all sites.

The full report is available [here](#).

Dog DNA identification

Dog DNA scheme - London Borough of Barking and Dagenham [\[link\]](#)

London Borough of Barking and Dagenham introduced a voluntary dog DNA registration scheme that allows dog owners to access their pet's DNA profile, breed overviews, a place to store medical records, kennel information, etc) through PooPrints UK. This also allowed the council to match any dog fouling found to an owner. During the scheme pilot they found around 50% less fouling than they usually would on their streets, with reductions up to 90% reported.

Public Spaces Protection Orders

Some local authorities have introduced [Public Spaces Protection Orders](#) (previously called Dog Control Orders) in public areas that require residents to do things such as:

- Keep your dog on a lead
- Limit the number of dogs you can have with you
- Clean up after your dog
- Put your dog on a lead if told to by someone from the council or police
- Stop your dog going to certain places – like parts of a park
- Carry disposable bags or a poop scoop

Ignoring Public Spaces Protection Orders can lead to a £100 on the spot fine (also known as a Fixed Penalty Notice), or up to £1,000 if this leads to court action.

Councils have a duty to let the public know where Public Spaces Protection Orders are in place, for example 'no dogs' signs if dogs are not allowed in a specific park.

Public spaces protection order – Caerphilly County Borough Council [\[link\]](#)

Caerphilly County Borough Council introduced a Public Spaces Protection Order to:

- Continue to exclude dogs from all enclosed children's play areas within the county borough
- Require 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 alarm or distress or to prevent a nuisance
- Requires dog owners to remove dog faeces on any land. You must clean up after your dog in all public places in Caerphilly County Borough.
- Requires dogs to be kept on leads in enclosed memorial gardens situated in the county borough
- Requires dog walkers to carry an appropriate receptacle for dealing with the waste that dog dog(s) produce. This requirement aims to ensure that dog walkers always have the means (i.e. a receptacle) to pick up their dog's faeces

This enhanced the council's ability to deal with irresponsible dog owners.

Plain clothed enforcement officers

Plain clothed enforcement officers - Plymouth City Council [\[link\]](#)

Plymouth City Council have started using plain clothed environmental enforcement officers in areas where fouling has been reported. They noted that when people decide they're not going to pick up after their dogs, they have a look around and check there isn't an enforcement officer around and then continue walking, and that plain clothed enforcement officers add an additional deterrent to this type of offender.

The officers carry Plymouth City Council identification that will be produced at the start of any conversation with the public.

CCTV

CCTV at dog fouling hot spots – Craven District Council [[link](#)]

Craven District Council's Policy Committee approved plans to tackle dog fouling hot spots with CCTV cameras in order to obtain the necessary evidence to fine/prosecute those responsible. There are plans to install CCTV in key areas where intelligence and evidence confirm that persistent offending is occurring.

The Council also plans to increase the numbers of patrols, and to continue their education programme in schools.

Events

Family and Dog Fun Day event – Scottish Borders Council [[link](#)]

Scottish Borders Council run a Family and Dog Fun Day as part of their responsible dog ownership strategy, with a range of activities and stalls for all ages and their dogs. This year's event (their third so far) included activities such as:

- Les Amis D'Onno dog display team
- Dryburgh Abbey Training Group with 'have a go' dog agility
- Dog training demonstrations by Braw Puppy
- A fun dog show

This was alongside activities for the whole family including: face-painting, a bouncy castle, a scavenger hunt and a colouring competition for children.

The event also allows families to engage with the council and to get information on the Green Dog Walker scheme, get free pet health checks and microchipping was available for a small fee. More than 300 people turned up to the previous year's show.

The Council recognise that having as many responsible dog owners as possible will help to reduce issues around out of control dogs, fouling, stray dogs and anti-social behaviour.

3.0 APSE Comment

APSE encourages our member councils to keep sharing their failures and successes in approaches to tackling dog fouling. Judging by news media stories since our last briefing on this topic and discussions at advisory group meetings, it does not seem like anyone has completely eradicated dog fouling in their local area.

Dog fouling can be a difficult thing to tackle without punishing responsible dog owners in the process. Pet ownership, according to the [Mental Health Foundation](#), can help us to live mentally healthier lives with research showing benefits for those suffering depression, loneliness, later life stresses, ADHD, autism and walking dogs helps people stay more socially connected. It is important that council actions to reduce fouling does not negatively impact those that are reaping other benefits from pet ownership.

Public Spaces Protection Orders need to be reasonable and taken in conjunction with the public. Dog fouling alone may not be enough for the public to accept their necessity. It is important that dogs get enough exercise, so this needs to be considered when designating no-dog areas. The [PDSA](#) recommends that breeds of dogs such as golden retrievers and labrador retrievers may require 2+ hours of exercise per day, and that they should be able to spend time off-lead in a secure area to run around. Owners with limited mobility or lack of access to appropriate transport need to be able to access public spaces that allow them to properly exercise their pets.

Education approaches and campaigns undertaken should try to target all ages and communicate the dangers of toxocariasis (a disease that can cause blindness), especially to young children. Owners should be made aware that bagged dog waste can be disposed of in normal bins and not just in dog bins (where applicable), and authorities carry out audits of the locations and use of bins to make sure the provision is appropriate across areas with a high prevalence of fouling.

Where possible, councils should be trying to make allies out of responsible dog owners, improving mechanisms for public reporting (e.g. through social media) and utilising their insights to help identify the individuals who are the source of the issue, and publicising successful prosecutions.

Garry Lee
Research & Coordination Officer

Louise Melville
Principal Advisor (Scotland)