

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

RECORD OF DECISION OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING AND HEALTH

Decision Made: 4 October 2023

Tackling Anti-Social Behaviour relating to dogs: Updating our enforcement tools

Issue for Decision

To ask the Head of Housing and Regulatory Services to make a new Dog Control Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) with new measures that build upon existing dog control measures.

Decision Made

Having received clarification of the exclusion of certain parks in the order and any additional wording on professional dog walkers for paragraph 7c of the PSPO, The Head of Housing and Regulatory Services be asked to make a new dog control PSPO as set out in appendix 4 of the Head of Housing and Regulatory Services' Report.

Reasons for Decision

Public Space Protection Orders and their role in Dog Control

Public Spaces Protection Orders (PSPOs) are intended to provide a means of preventing individuals or groups committing anti-social behaviour in a public space where the behaviour is having or is likely to have a detrimental effect on the quality of life of those in the locality; is or likely to be persistent or continuing in nature; and or is, likely to be unreasonable.

Powers introduced by the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014, which introduced PSPOs, included transition arrangements whereby any existing Dog Control Orders (DCOs) converted into PSPOs in October 2017. Unlike DCOs, there is a requirement for PSPOs to be reviewed every three years to ensure they remain appropriate.

The existing Dog Control PSPO which transitioned in 2020 has five main prohibitions:

- Dog fouling
- Exclusion of dogs from fenced play areas and Tennis Courts
- Keep Dogs on Leads in the Vinters Park Crematorium and Associated Grounds and the Sutton Road Cemetery
- Dogs on Leads by Direction
- Keeping Dogs Under Proper Control

The PSPO also sets out an offence of failing to provide details of identity when asked to do so, as this was not included in the provision itself and it also sets out the Fixed Penalty Notice level at £100.

Home office guidance states that when making PSPOs, Local Authorities should ensure proposed restrictions are focused on specific behaviours and are proportionate to the detrimental effect that the behaviour is causing or can cause, and are necessary to prevent it from continuing, occurring or recurring. PSPOs create criminal offences, which carry the same burden of proof as any other criminal offence and must be proved beyond all reasonable doubt.

Consideration must also be given to the Local Authorities' ability to enforce the prohibitions and the public expectation creating such orders might create. This is of particular importance when considering controlling behaviour associated with dogs. Experience and feedback from institutions such as the Kennel Club and the Dog's Trust have taught us that dog owners are very responsive to measures that are introduced when they are considered justified and proportionate. Where this is not the case the opposite is often prevalent, with deliberate acts of defiance commonplace. This was demonstrated when some areas have tried to introduce large dogs on leads areas.

The delegated authority to make PSPOs sits with the Head of Housing and Regulatory Services once approved by the Cabinet Member for Housing and Health.

PSPO can be appealed in the High Court if the council did not have the power to make the order or include particular prohibitions/requirements within them or statutory processes are not followed. Appeals can be made up to six weeks after the date on which the order is made/varied by anyone who lives in, or regularly works or visits the area. A PSPO can also be challenged by judicial review on public law grounds within three months of the decision or action subject to challenge.

REVIEW OF EXISTING PSPO, ITS USE AND PROPOSED MEASURES

Prior to undertaking a public consultation, the Community Protection Team, including its animal welfare specialist, reviewed the current PSPO provision in line with national and local trends, the relevant information provided in the annual Community Safety Strategic Assessment and feedback from relevant agencies, including Kent Police and other stakeholders.

The proposed measures put forward for the consultation were to renew the existing measures, as described in 2.3 of the report, with the following additions:

- To add to the fouling measure a requirement to ensure that bags or similar equivalent are carried.
- To extend the dogs on leads provision to also include the Town Centre.
- To introduce a new measure limiting the number of dogs walked by an individual to 4, or 6 if part of a licensed dog related business or

registered as a professional dog walker.

As part of the renewal process the local authority has to demonstrate that the PSPO is effective. For matters, such as dog control, it is important to understand the PSPO acts as part of a suite of tools and powers that the team utilise for tackling dog related ASB. As previously demonstrated with the renewal of the Town Centre PSPO, the Dog Control PSPO equips officers with tools that can be used alongside other powers, depending on the seriousness of the incident or the need to challenge behaviour in the moment. Each incident is assessed, using our enforcement policies, the officer's training and operational guidance in order to determine the most suitable outcome. The following are working examples to help with understanding how the PSPO works in practice.

Worked Examples:

Dog Fouling and the need to carry suitable bags - if an authorised officer witnesses an irresponsible dog owner failing to not clean up after their dog a Fixed Penalty Notice is likely to be issued. This is because of the seriousness of the offence and the cumulative benefit of ensuring everyone knows that it is wrong to not clean up after their dog. If, in the same incident, the dog owner also has no bags and can offer no reasonable excuse for not having any, a further Fixed Penalty Notice could be issued. If they refuse the Fixed Penalty Notice or do not cooperate then the matter would be referred for prosecution for two offences. If the same person is walking their dog, has forgotten their bags, but no fouling occurs, then advice would be given.

Not under proper control - if an incident occurs where a dog is alleged to have not been under proper control, consideration can be given as to whether the PSPO Measure can be used. It is highly unlikely that an officer will witness the incident and therefore the officer will use their investigative skills to gather as much evidence as possible. This could include taking witness statements and interviewing the accused owner under caution. If they are satisfied that there is a case to answer the officer can issue a Fixed Penalty Notice or if deemed too serious, can escalate straight to prosecution. If it is unclear, such as in a dog-on-dog attack, where it is not possible to prove beyond all reasonable doubt that one party was to blame, the officer might choose to issue a formal warning, commonly referred to as a Community Protection Warning requiring steps to be taken to minimise the risk of recurrence. Failure to take steps or further incidents could then result in either a Fixed Penalty Notice for the PSPO or an escalation to Community Protection Notice. Breaches of Community Protection Notices have additional orders available to the Magistrates' Court, including orders to seize and rehome the dog responsible if appropriate to do so.

In 2021, 9 Fixed Penalty Notice were issued for breaches of the PSPO. In 2022 51 were issued and in 2023, up to July, 45 were issued. The majority of these were in relation to dogs not being under proper control and were found straying in the borough.

Details of the assessment and the proposed measures, justification and consultation response/feedback can be found in Appendix 1 of the report.

Public Consultation Response Summary

A public consultation was undertaken from 9th June 2023 to the 6th August. A total of 1128 survey responses were received, of which 929 of these were weighted responses, which makes it more representative of the population. The survey found that the vast majority of the public are in favour of all the measures proposed. An in-depth analysis of the consultation survey responses is available in Appendix 2 of the report. In summary the responses were as follows.

	Dog Fouling	Requirement to carry bags etc	Exclusion from plays areas	Dogs on leads in Crem/Cem	Dogs on leads in the Town Centre	Dogs on lead by direction	Dogs under proper control	Limit the number of dogs walked	Provide ID when required	Fixed Penalty Notice (£100)
% Public in favour of measure	98	83	92	97	89	97	97	78	93	82

A response to the consultation was also sought from a number of canine specialist groups including the Kennel Club. Their response is provided in Appendix 3 of the report.

Following a review of feedback, adjustments were made to ensure the proposed measures are proportionate and necessary. This is included in Section 5 of Appendix 1 of the report. Further detail on this is provided in Section 4 of the report as the preferred option.

The order will support officers in dealing with irresponsible dog owners, particularly in high risk and sensitive locations using a range of tools to engage, explain, encourage and enforce the legislation in accordance with their Enforcement Policy.

Enforcement of the proposed measures and exemptions

In 2.11 of the report, worked examples are given that set out the way in which the PSPO is used alongside other enforcement tools to reduce dog related ASB. Given the extensive work of the Community Protection Team, including priorities determined by both the Community Safety Partnership Plan and their Statutory Duties for nuisance and licensing, dog control is a relatively small area of work. Whilst the Community Protection Team does not have the capacity to routinely "patrol" the borough, the team remains responsive to the issues raised in relation to dog control, which can be very emotive.

Evidence led enforcement and reactive enforcement will continue to be the main focus for the team when enforcing the measures as outlined in 4.1 of the report. Officers from the Community Protection Team can challenge anyone they witness committing an offence whilst going about their duties, such as

failing to clean up after their dog. Officers from the Waste Crime Team are also authorised in relation to fouling.

It is proposed to retain the fixed penalty level at £100 for all offences created by the PSPO. This will be consistent with the recently renewed Town Centre PSPO and is the maximum currently available for PSPOs. The maximum fine for prosecution is set out in the legislation at £1000. A reduced payment will also be made available for the measure relating to dogs not under proper control for early repayment.

As with similar offences, any income generated by the use of fixed penalty notices would be reinvested into the service to encourage responsible dog ownership and cover some of the costs associated in delivering dog control in the borough.

There are no prescribed exemptions under PSPOs. However, the current PSPO sets out a series of exemptions that will be included in the proposed PSPO. The exemptions are where a person:

- a. is registered as a blind person in a register compiled under section 29 of the National Assistance Act 1948, or "severely sight impaired", or "sight impaired" under the Care Act 2014; or
- b. has a disability which affects his mobility, manual dexterity, physical coordination, or ability to lift, carry, or otherwise move everyday objects, in respect of a dog trained by a "prescribed charity" and upon which he relies for assistance;
- c. each of the following is a "prescribed charity"
 - i. Dogs for the Disabled (registered charity 700454)
 - ii. Support Dogs (registered charity 1088281)
 - iii. Canine Partners for Independence (registered charity number 803680)
 - iv. Hearing dogs for deaf people (registered charity number 293358)
 - v. Any charity created subsequent to this Order, which covers the issues detailed in point b. above.

The Housing, Health and Environment Policy Advisory Committee considered the matter on 7 September 2023 and recommended that the PSPO be

approved, subject to the Cabinet Member for Housing and Health receiving satisfactory clarification on the exclusion of certain parks in the order and any additional wording on professional dog walkers for paragraph 7c of the PSPO.

Alternatives considered and why rejected

Do Nothing - If the existing or proposed measures are not renewed they will no longer create any offences in relation to dog control. This would remove a useful tool used to tackle irresponsible dog ownership and supervision, risk considerable reputational damage as it would not be aligned with our strategic plan and may be considered a failure of our duty under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 to take steps to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour within our borough.

Renew existing measures from current PSPO - Whilst this will allow for a useful tool to continue to be used its effectiveness will be slightly diminished due to the limitations of those measures to allow officers to challenge irresponsible dog ownership.

Implement some of the proposed measures identified in section 4 of the report or additional measures – Council may wish to choose to only implement certain aspects of the PSPO or additional measures. This is not considered appropriate or recommended as the detailed process, research and consultation undertaken to date have been considered in bringing the proposal as set out in section 4 of the report. Choosing to implement only some of the recommendations may suggest that the Council are not willing to listen to the public opinion gathered and limit officers’ ability to challenge inappropriate behaviour. In addition, any new measures would need to be consulted on prior to implementation alongside all the measures already proposed and would prevent the order being made before the current order expires.

Background Papers

None.

I have read and approved the above decision for the reasons (including possible alternative options rejected) as set out above.



Signed: _____

Councillor Lottie Parfitt-Reid, Cabinet Member for Housing and Health

Full details of both the report for the decision taken above and any consideration by the relevant Policy Advisory Committee can be found at the following area of the [website](#)

Call-In: Should you be concerned about this decision and wish to call it in, please submit a call-in form signed by any three Members to the Proper Officer by: **5pm Wednesday 11 October 2023**