Reduce Dog Fouling

Task and Finish Group draft report

October 2012

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1. Introduction from Councillor Elliott

Instances of dog owners not picking up after their dogs are few and far between, but the impact of not picking up is high and raises the perception that dog fouling may be a bigger problem than it really is. Often, as councillors, our residents tell us that it is a problem and that we should be doing something about it. Behaviour change is hard to achieve and we all need to work together to put pressure on irresponsible dog owners. Not picking up after a dog is anti-social and those that fail to pick up display a disregard for other people, public health and the environment.

I’d received a great deal of support from fellow Councillors, both at the Borough Council and the Town Council for taking this forward. The Chairman of Overview and Scrutiny at the Council mentioned our work in the Council’s ‘Local’ magazine and as Town Councillors we have kept Southborough Town Council informed of our progress.

This report concludes that the best method of dealing with irresponsible dog owners is through awareness raising, peer pressure and education, with enforcement action being available, to encourage responsible dog ownership.

My thanks go to the members of the Group, my colleagues at the Council and those that we visited, who welcomed our interest in their best practice.

If the recommendations in this report are agreed, the Council could achieve

- A 40-60% reduction in instances of irresponsible dog ownership across the borough
- An increase in the number of ‘intelligent’ dog fouling reports received by the council
- The promotion of the understanding that ‘any bin will do’ and responsible dog ownership

2. Objective of the review

The Group set out to find a way to reduce dog fouling in Southborough and to roll out the method across the borough, working with Town and Parish Councils.

3. Recommendations

Tunbridge Wells Borough Council should:

1. Roll out a programme of bag and flag events starting in Southborough on 25 October 2012 and thereafter in locations based on intelligence gathered
2. Move to an intelligence gathering approach, rather than a reactive approach
3. Promote a message that ‘any waste bin will do’
4. Develop a toolkit to enable local Parish & Town Council’s (and other Community Groups) to deliver their own bag & flag events – leaflets, bags, flags and promotional cards
5. Enable Task & Finish Group members take forward this approach with Parish Chairs and the Tunbridge Wells Town Forum.
6. Explore the introduction of a high profile enforcement campaign issuing fixed penalty notices to those caught dropping litter and not cleaning up after their dogs.

Tunbridge Wells Borough Council suggests that Southborough Town Council

Re-consider their approach to the collection of dog waste with regard to the promotion of the ‘any bin will do’ message and the potential to save money.
4. Background and key facts

Health
Dog faeces can also spread toxocariasis which is a rare infection carried by round-worm parasites. Covert toxocariasis is the most common form of infection and symptoms include abdominal pain, a cough and headache. Visceral toxocariasis presents symptoms including fever, abdominal pain and shortness of breath. The least common form is ocular toxocariasis causing blurred or cloudy vision and irritation of the eyes. Left untreated it can cause permanent loss of vision although only one eye is usually affected. Toxocariasis usually affects children aged between one and four years old although cases have been reported in people of all ages. Instances of dog fouling will deter people especially parents and children from using the green spaces that are a facility to be used to improve their health and well being.

Dog Fouling and the Law
The Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005 repealed the Dogs (Fouling of Land) Act 1996 and dog fouling is now one of five dog control matters that can be regulated by way of Dog Control Orders. Local authorities and town and parish councils can designate areas of land and make a Dog Control Order to apply to that land. This system of Dog Control Orders replaces that of making bylaws, or designations under the now repealed Dogs (Fouling of Land) Act 1996. However, existing bylaws will continue to apply until a control order is made in concern of the same offence and relating to the same land. Existing dog fouling designations will continue to apply until a control order is made for any of the dog offences in respect of that land. Therefore any orders made under the 1996 Act will continue to have effect indefinitely, and enforcement through fixed penalty notices (fixed at £50) and prosecution can continue as normal. Tunbridge Wells Borough Council has not made any Dog Control Orders and enforcement takes place under the Dogs (Fouling of Land) Act 1996, from which the Borough has designated all of its land.

If, for example, a Council makes a Dog Control Order in respect of a park requiring dogs to be kept on a lead, the 1996 Act will cease to apply in respect of the park, but will continue to have effect in the rest of the Borough until such a time as it might be extinguished by a further Dog Control Order.

Dog Fouling in the Borough of Tunbridge Wells
In 2011 the Council received 91 complaints of fouling, and to date in 2012 the Council has received 88. Since May 2010, 7 Fixed Penalty Notices have been served, with 3 cases for non payment being referred to the Magistrates’ Court. The level of complaints about dog fouling are lower than for other types of littering but the impact of dog fouling is high. The general response from the Council focuses on the dog owner being inconsiderate and not clearing up after their dog. On odd occasions a complaint may relate to an unsuccessful investigation or cleansing standards not being achieved.

The Borough Council does not operate a separate bin scheme for dog waste but does provide bags to pick up waste in its parks. After picking up, dog owners are able to put their plastic bag of waste in to park or street litter bins or their green bin at home. Southborough Town Council, and some other local councils have decided to provide bespoke dog waste bins which then required a separate collection from the general waste bins.

The Street Scene Enforcement Officers investigate the complaints as part of their role which also includes investigating littering, fly posting, fly tipping abandoned vehicles, graffiti, reports of stray dogs and the correct use waste transfer notes.

On receipt of a complaint the officers would:

- Try and speak to the owner of the dog
- Patrol the area in question at times that it is likely that they will witness the offence
- Put up Dog Fouling signs
- Consider installing or moving a litter bin
- Consider the need for additional cleansing on a temporary basis
The Ridgewaye Playing Fields, Southborough

The Group undertook a field visit to the Ridgewaye Playing Field in Southborough. This had been identified as a ‘hotspot’ area by Councillors from the feedback they had received as part of their election work in May 2012. The Group noted that there were sufficient dog waste and general waste bins but that there was limited signage. The Group understood that Southborough Town Council would be responsible for signage in the area if it chose to put some up.

A local resident who regularly used the playing field for local football was approached and asked what his perception was of dog fouling in the area? The resident explained that there was no more a problem at this location than anywhere else and felt that if anything, a few bags would help, but he understood that the bag dispensers could be misused. As a dog owner himself, he carried bags anyway. Another resident exercising his dog at the playing fields was observed and acted correctly with regard to clearing up after his dog. It was acknowledged that most dog walkers were very responsible.

The use of a separate waste bin for dog waste was considered. It was noted that there were general waste bins located right next to the dog waste bins. Taking into account that dog waste could be disposed of in the general waste bins, it was concluded that Southborough Town Council may wish to reconsider their approach to the disposal of dog waste and use any saving generated from that for signage or a behaviour change campaign.

5. Method

As with many Overview and Scrutiny reviews, a large amount of information was already available and many other councils had tackled the same issue. The method the Group chose was:

- To conduct a site visit at a time when the Ridgewaye playing field was likely to be in use to assess the situation with the Council’s Street Scene Enforcement officer.

- To undertake two visits to our neighbouring Councils, Tonbridge and Malling and Maidstone. These had been recognised as having a best practice approach to tackling irresponsible dog ownership. We also cross checked our proposed method with some desktop research about what other councils were doing to tackle irresponsible dog owners and change their behaviour.
6. Findings

Behaviour change
The Cabinet Office report Mindspace (2010) explained that influencing behaviour is central to public policy. As citizens, communities and policymakers, we want to stop bad behaviours and encourage good ones. The most effective and sustainable changes in behaviour will come from the successful integration of cultural, regulatory and individual change. Behavioural change in this context sees the soft touch of policy rather than its heavy hand, it needs a peer group of responsible dog owners to be part of the solution, encouraging responsible dog ownership as a social norm, just like being quiet in a library. Similarly, a priming approach can reinforce intentions to act in a certain way - deliberately placing certain objects in one’s environment - ‘situational cues’ are proven to alter behaviour.

Tonbridge and Malling had been a lead authority in the 2010 Keep Britain Tidy Campaign which featured an eye-catching ‘dog poo fairy’ with a clear message of ‘there’s no such thing as the Dog Poo Fairy’, This national campaign had proven to be a catalyst for the Council’s approach to tackling dog fouling – ‘bag and flag’ events are ‘situational cues’ which engage the community in promoting the social norm and use a priming approach to alter behaviour.

Bag and flag events
A bag and flag events are a proven method in reducing dog fouling. The event sees the local community working with the Council in a hotspot area to ‘bag’ dog fouling in high visibility bags and ‘flag’ the area with small flags. ‘A boards’ are then placed around the site. The aim is to promote a situational que whereby irresponsible dog walkers will see the site and reflect on their own behaviour.

Tonbridge and Malling identified their bag and flag hotspot areas using ‘community reporters’ who were ordinary residents reporting instances of irresponsible dog ownership to the Council. Each event took place with participants from the community and the bags, flags and appropriate signage was left for a full 24 hours to ensure that awareness had been raised amongst those on a consistent walking pattern. A key message was that the community had to take responsibility for its surroundings and be proactive about changing behaviour rather than see enforcement as a reactive solution.

The impact of the events was impressive. Ranging from a 43% reduction in Aylesford to an 80% reduction in Plaxtol with an average reduction in irresponsible dog ownership of 66%. Links to dog shows and vets had been established. 15 Fixed Penalty Notices had been issued.
There was a risk that the 24 hour period of the event may lead to vandalism. This risk could be mitigated by ensuring that clean up contractors were aware of the event and could allocate resources to deal with any problem that arose. Enforcement was more resource intensive on the Council and less engaging for the community. An enabling approach to the events was needed while the Council retained its enforcement function.

The events need to involve dog owners, not seek to identify them as part of the problem. The majority of dog owners take responsibility for cleaning up after their dogs and that message needed to come across in awareness raising campaigns. Similarly, a raised expectation that only enforcement will tackle the problem, gives the wrong message to the community who are key to promoting behaviour change and responsible dog ownership.

The Group discussed how to measure the impact of its work and concluded that the most effective way was to take the approach of Tonbridge and Malling, namely to count the number of instances of fouling in a specified area, run a bag and flag event, then return to the same area 2 months later and count the instances of fouling again.

Community involvement
Tonbridge and Malling also explained that they saw a wider role for the community in tackling irresponsible dog owners. If the Community wanted to address the problem, they needed to take on a role themselves since the irresponsible dog owners were their neighbours. A wide pool of community groups, town and parish councils, and youth groups were all part of a local resource acting as stewards of their local environment and should be enabled to tackle any problems that arise.

Community engagement was vital in tackling dog fouling, bag and flag events were most successful when a small group from the community had engaged with them, the ‘dog poo fairy’ wasn’t a necessary feature however since it was more appropriate to involve a recognised group of local residents and dog walkers. A key message was that responsible dog owners could be seen as a resource to tackle dog fouling by encouraging other owners to clean up after their dog.

Maidstone’s had a planned ‘off the shelf’ approach to bag and flag events, namely that a parish or town council could run events themselves with little or no resource impact on the Borough Council. The Group concluded that the Council’s approach should seek to move to an ‘off the shelf’ toolkit as soon as possible, rather than seek to run every event entirely within its own resources.

An Intelligence led approach
Maidstone’s approach was intelligence driven rather than reactive to individual complaints. A range of questions were asked of complainants and they were informed that the information would be used for intelligence purposes rather than a reaction to that particular incident. The data gleaned would then be used in a mapping exercise so that a targeted letter and postcard campaign could be used. This would see a particular street or block of flats being proactively engaged for four purposes a) to raise awareness amongst those neighbouring the culprit, b) to target the culprit themselves, c) to drive out any further information about the culprit and d) to cause a behaviour change by making it clear that a problem had been identified and that it was being addressed.
If there was a community perception of dog fouling across a wide area, a bag and flag event would be the likely approach. If there was a consistent problem in one particular area, for example outside a block of flats or on an isolated street, then a postcard campaign through every letterbox in the area would be undertaken. This campaign would highlight the problem to the neighbours and the offender and ‘raise the stakes’ in tackling the irresponsible owner.

The Group concluded that the Council could move away from its current reactive approach (often to single complainants) to an intelligence led approach.

Any bin will do
A key message promoted at Tonbridge and Malling was that of ‘any waste bin will do’ since dog owners may not know that they don’t need to use a bespoke dog waste bin to dispose of their bags, any general waste bin could be used, or the owner could take the bag home and dispose of it in their household waste bin.

In Southborough, the Town Council provides bespoke dog waste bins and these are emptied by a contractor at a cost of around £4,000 per year. The Group assumed that this cost would naturally reduce due to the message that ‘any waste bin will do’, but also felt that Southborough Town Council could reconsider their approach to bespoke bins as there was a clear opportunity to make a financial saving.

The Group had been approached by Tikspac, a Swedish company, specialising in the provision of dog waste bins and bag dispensers. They offered a solution which carried advertising on the surround plates of the stations along with a dispenser that limited the amount of bags that could be extracted at once, they also explained that the opening on their bins was unique. Advertising covered the costs and supply of the solution would be free to the Local Authority.

The Group considered the solution and concluded that bespoke dog bins did not fit with the best practice promotional campaign of ‘any bin will do’, and advertising on physical assets would not be suitable for the borough, as demonstrated by the Public Realm Review 2011-12.

Signage
On signage, Tonbridge and Malling recommended using pavement spray paint signs as well as more inventively designed post-based signs. When the Group mentioned the risk of the signs looking cluttered or being placed in the wrong place, Tonbridge and Malling felt risks could be taken within reason and that if there was a problem with a sign then it could always be taken down again later. Maidstone urged caution on this since signage was often a reaction to a complainant – that the Council was seen to be doing something, rather than part of a wider campaign to promote behaviour change. The Group felt that the Council’s approach to signage should take into account the Public Realm Review 2011-12 and seek to minimise unnecessary signage.
Enforcement
The Group were keen to understand approaches to enforcement. In particular, how did or how would enforcement activity help to achieve the Group’s objective of reducing dog fouling? The desktop research had led the Group to think of Tonbridge and Malling as offering an educational and advice approach to behaviour change whilst Maidstone offered a more enforcement based approach.

It quickly became clear that Maidstone’s approach to reducing dog fouling was not the ‘zero tolerance’ enforcement approach the Group expected. Their approach was behaviour change too, and it was very similar to the approach at Tonbridge and Malling. It was usefully summarised as three e’s: educate, equip and enforce.

The ‘zero tolerance’ approach had impacted on littering vastly more than dog fouling, 97% of Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs) had been issued for littering. The number of FPNs issued for Dog Fouling was around 1%. Maidstone had engaged a private sector company called XFor to supplement the delivery its street scene enforcement function working with existing staff employed by the Council.

The Group considered an example of a 12 week enforcement pilot scheme run by Islington Borough Council aimed specifically at irresponsible dog owners which showed a level of investment at £134,000, for a return of 22 tickets at a cost of £5000 per ticket. This, coupled with the evidence from Maidstone, (that less than one percent of their enforcement activity was on dog fouling), showed that first and foremost an active community led behaviour change campaign was the solution coupled with an appropriate level of intelligence led enforcement.

Roles
It was clear that the problem of irresponsible dog ownership could be addressed by the community in partnership with the local authority. Building on the experiences of the Group, we devised this simple table to show that working together with clear roles is what works.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individual</th>
<th>Community Groups, Town &amp; Parish Councils</th>
<th>Borough Council</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clear up after your dog</td>
<td>Encourage the reporting of irresponsible dog fouling instances to the Borough Council</td>
<td>Move to an intelligence led recording system (see p6), building up a profile of hot spot areas to enable the targeting of resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Report instances of dog fouling to the Council so that ‘hot spot’ areas can be identified</td>
<td>Ask for the ‘bag &amp; flag’ toolkit and organise community events</td>
<td>Provide ‘bag &amp; flag’ toolkit to Community Groups &amp; Town &amp; Parish Councils</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understand that individuals are part of tackling the problem, and participate in the solution</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promote the message that any bin will do</td>
<td>Promote the message that any bin will do</td>
<td>Promote the message that any bin will do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Intelligence led enforcement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
7. A new approach to littering enforcement?

The Group quickly realised that, based on the evidence from Maidstone, the Council could consider a similar approach to littering enforcement. During August 2012, Maidstone’s enforcement team had issued 455 Fixed Penalty Notices of which 442 were for cigarette litter, 3 for fast food litter, 3 for printed literature, 3 for dropping chewing gum and 5 were categorized as ‘other’. The annual scale of Fixed Penalty Notices issued is summarized in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2008-09</th>
<th>2009-10</th>
<th>2010-11</th>
<th>2011-12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FPNs Issued</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>3298</td>
<td>4434</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For offer a low risk service. The Council only pays per ticket issued and the income generated by each FPN issued would pay for the outsourcing of the FPN Enforcement Officers. If no FPNs are issued, the Council would not be charged for the service. However, the Group noted that the Council needed to be aware of the risk of non-payment of fines due to those caught dropping litter not giving their real names to the enforcement officer.

The Group felt that, based on the success of the Maidstone enforcement campaign, the Council should consider a similar enforcement approach to littering as a Strategic Compass Community Project, as part of the Green quadrant.

8. Options analysis, conclusion and costs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Analysis</th>
<th>1 Do nothing</th>
<th>2 Engage in Zero Tolerance with limited Community buy-in</th>
<th>3 Run a positive series of bag &amp; flag events &amp; adopt other best practice methods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positives</td>
<td>No additional resource or cost to the Council</td>
<td>Appeals to ‘User Pays’ principle Money would be raised from issuing FPNs</td>
<td>Involves the Community Enables Community Groups, Town &amp; Parish Councils to take a proactive lead in tackling the problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negatives</td>
<td>Perception of dog fouling being a problem remains high Negative perception that local authority is doing nothing about the problem</td>
<td>FPNs issued for dog fouling would remain low &amp; not tackle the problem</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>Unsustainable</td>
<td>Objective not achieved</td>
<td>Preferred option</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Group came to a consensus that behaviour change through bag & flag events leads to a 40–60% reduction in dog fouling. The events are scalable and can be run with little or no direct input from the Borough Council. A clear message that enforcement measures are in place should be encouraged and the promotion of an ‘any bin will do’ message will help to tackle the problem. A one-off budget outlay of £338 would be sufficient to produce the necessary toolkit to run the events. This was made up of £60 for flags, £178 for stickers, £40 for 1000 high visibility bags and £60 for posters for A boards.
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We try to include as wide a range of individuals and organisations to assist us in our work as possible.

The Committee has a twitter account you can follow www.twitter.com/twbc_scrutiny,
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