



SCRUTINY FORUM EXECUTIVE

Report of the
SCRUTINY PANEL
into
DOG FOULING

26 January 2001

SCRUTINY PANEL

MEMBERS:	Councillor M Blanshard (Chair) Councillor R Briggs Councillor M Fearnley
LEAD OFFICER:	Tony Gerrard (Head of Resources (Education and Community Services))
COMMITTEE ADMINISTRATOR:	Darren Tones (Tel. 01484 221709)

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 About the Panel

- * The Panel consisted of three Kirklees Ward Members. Councillor Maggie Blanshard as the appointed Chair accompanied by Councillors Rita Briggs and Margaret Fearnley. Tony Gerard, Kirklees Council's Head of Resources (Education and Community Services) and Darren Tones from the Council's Committee Services acted as support to the Panel throughout the process.

1.2 About the Review

- * The Panel was asked to undertake its role by Kirklees Council's Scrutiny Executive, the Group of Councillors who under the terms of the Local Government Act 2000 were charged with the responsibility of investigating and monitoring the relevance and effectiveness of Council Services and other agencies and their decisions.
- * The Review relates to the problem of dog fouling within the District and the response of those services with responsibility for preventing dog fouling.
- * The Panel welcomed the positive responses received from those individuals and organisations keen to participate in the Review.

1.3 Terms of Reference

As an early part of its work the Panel agreed its Terms of Reference as being:-

- (i) To establish an understanding of the scale and impact of problems associated with dog fouling within Kirklees.
- (ii) To establish an understanding of the responses by services to the problems associated with dog fouling.
- (iii) To make appropriate recommendations

1.4 The Work of the Panel

- * The Panel sought to try and develop an overall awareness of the problems associated with dog fouling and of the preventative measures implemented in response to the issue.
- * The Panel held open meetings in discussion with various specialists on Monday 17 July 2000, Thursday 31 August 2000 and Monday 30 October 2000.
- * The Panel has also interviewed witnesses and taken observations from the Council's Environmental Services (Dog Warden Service) and the Leisure and Recreation Service.
- * The strength of the Panel's work is its capacity to take an objective overview and to view the activities that were taking place from a different perspective than those individuals and organisations that operated within the system. At the conclusion of its work the Panel had gained in-depth knowledge of the problems associated with dog fouling within limited timescales.
- * The Panel has therefore developed a rounded view of issues and concerns which have led to the observations it has made, conclusions it has reached and the recommendations it has put forward.

2. THE RESPONSE TO DOG FOULING

2.1 Council's Response to Dog Fouling

2.1.1 The Panel explored the Council's response to dog fouling which was based upon direct and indirect responses. A resume of the Council's responses is as follows:-

- (i) **Direct Response** - The Panel were informed that the Council's direct response comprised both reactive and proactive work.

The reactive response of the Council was to complaints concerning dog fouling, investigations and the taking of formal or informal action as required. Informal action would include a verbal or written warning, whilst formal action would include a formal caution or prosecution. It was noted by the Panel that where a number of complaints were received within particular areas that this would trigger specific action. Environmental Services would target the area and, if necessary, arrange for dog faeces to be removed and, when circumstances warranted, undertake a proactive leaflet drop alerting individuals to the problems of dog fouling.

The proactive response covered a number of aspects including:

designating land under the Dogs (Fouling of Land) Act 1996. All land in Kirklees was now designated. The Act created an offence of not clearing up immediately after a dog had fouled although the main problem was that the law did not take into account what to do with the waste. A further practical problem was that very few people would give a reliable witness statement to enable the Council to proceed with Court action. The cost of taking cases to Court was also expensive and the results not generally satisfactory as fines were minimal.

Erecting signs: approximately 13,000 signs had been erected on street lamp posts throughout the District requesting owners not to allow their dogs to foul and to keep their dogs on a lead. Extra signage could be introduced if requested and justified whilst larger signs were currently being tested at Crow Nest Park, Dewsbury and the Roberttown Recreational Ground.

The Panel also considered the education, promotion and publicity arrangements which included talks within schools about responsible dog ownership; the inclusion of articles for publication in newspapers and newsletters; etc. and attendance at galas and fairs.

(ii) **Indirect Response**

These were mainly directed at picking up stray dogs which had the potential to foul. It was noted that dog fouling complaints tended to be specific and were generally centred on streets/grass verges, recreation areas and football pitches. Although fouling from stray dogs could not be discounted the Panel concurred that dog fouling mainly resulted from the actions of irresponsible dog owners.

3. BENCHMARKING PERFORMANCE COMPARISONS

3.1 The Scrutiny Panel considered benchmarking information summarising the practices undertaken in other Local Authorities which had been chosen because their dog related initiatives had previously received accolades for best practice.

3.2 In considering the Council's future response to dog fouling the Panel recognised that any proposed action would need to be reviewed in the context of the overall workload of the Kirklees Dog Warden Service.

3.3 It was acknowledged that very few formal proceedings for dog related offences were taken by other Local Authorities whilst the Kirklees Dog Warden Service had successfully prosecuted 164 individuals for 235 offences and formally cautioned another 57 individuals during the period November 1992 to March 2000. The Panel welcomed this approach although it accepted that, due to the complaint workload, Kirklees Dog Wardens were frequently forced into a reactive role and that proactive work such as the promotion of initiatives and/or education campaigns which were labour intensive, incurred significant cost implications and could therefore not always be pursued.

3.4 Only proposals which do not have major cost or time implications have been put forward by the Panel. More radical action would obviously have significant budget implications.

4. THE COUNCIL'S FUTURE RESPONSE TO DOG FOULING

4.1 The Panel considered a paper by the Animal Welfare Manager which proposed courses of action which could be accommodated within the current workload and budgetary considerations. The panel felt that these proposals offered a practical way forward and were framed as a set of escalating actions.

4.2 The proposals were:

- (i) Increasing publicity about dog fouling legislation, including the development of information on the Council Website.
- (ii) Provision of free poop-scoop bags through Kirklees on an ongoing basis. The Dog Wardens would distribute these as part of their daily work.
- (iii) Identify and target problem areas. Organise mail drops with free poop-scoop bags to every address within an identified area. Increase the number and size of dog fouling signs in problem areas. Monitor the effectiveness of this action and publicise it, adding that if indiscriminate dog fouling continued, enforcement action would be taken.
- (iv) If problem persists, Dog Wardens would visit the area again to carry out overt observations. Fixed penalty notices would be issued to offenders. The action should be publicised both before and after the event.
- (v) Implementation of covert observations to catch offenders where persistent dog fouling occurred. Any offenders would similarly be subject to formal action. Again publicity of the action would be necessary.

5. EDUCATION PROGRAMMES

- 5.1 The Panel accepted that the education of the community in respect of responsible dog ownership was a time consuming exercise. Education needed to be well targeted, continuous and the results evaluated. The Panel acknowledged that given the current levels of workload and priorities which mostly involved reactive responses, in order to make a meaningful contribution then either additional resources would be required or the re-prioritisation of work.
- 5.2 The Panel emphasised the need for positive measures to be undertaken to educate individuals and acknowledged that education programmes were conducted within schools although these were resource intensive. It was suggested that schools could be targeted within particular problem areas.
- 5.3 The Panel recognised that for dog owners to become more responsible the need existed for a change of attitude which should again be supported by education to raise awareness together with the appropriate enforcement measures.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Scrutiny Executive receives the report of the Ad Hoc Scrutiny Panel and refers it to the Environment and Transportation Scrutiny Panel and to the Environment and Transportation Management Board for information and comment.

The Recommendations of the Panel are summarised as follows:-

- (1) The Panel recognised during the review the paramount importance of education programmes both within schools and to educate dog owners in order to reduce the problems associated with dog fouling. As education of the community in respect of responsible dog ownership was resource intensive, the Panel concurred that education needed to be well targeted and recommended that

problem areas identified should be targeted to provide the appropriate educational programmes as part of the Council's future response.

- (2) The Panel recommends that the options within section 4 of this report outlining the Council's future response to dog fouling be supported and implemented whilst being contained within existing budgetary provisions.
- (3) The Panel welcomed the action already undertaken by the Council and in particular the direct and indirect approaches implemented in response to dog fouling and commended the Dog Warden Service on its work.