



Subject:	Update on Responsible Dog Ownership
Date:	9 February 2021
Reporting Officer:	Siobhan Toland, Director, City and Neighbourhood Services
Contact Officer:	Claire O'Neill, City Protection Manager

Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes ☐ No ☒
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	☐
After Council Decision	☐
Some time in the future	☐
Never	☐

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes ☒ No ☐

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	The outcome of irresponsible behaviours of some dog owners has an impact on the presence of dog fouling in some of our public spaces in the City. The purpose of this report is to provide the update requested by Members on the work that is carried out by the Community Awareness Team and the Dog Warden Service to tackle the issue of dog fouling and responsible dog ownership since the last update in August 2019.
1.2	This report also updates members on the Notice of Motion of discussed at People and Communities Committee on 3 March 2020 which detailed that: <i>"This Council notes:</i>

	• <i>the high number of complaints and the frustration of residents regarding dog fouling;</i> • <i>that cleansing, signage and bins to address the issues come at considerable cost to ratepayers, as well as being a public health risk; and</i> • <i>that other councils have piloted and adopted new methods for tackling persistent problems, notably DNA testing on dog fouling;</i> <i>The Council agrees, therefore, to undertake its own scoping exercise of DNA testing and to bring back recommendations on whether it is something that could be adopted for Belfast.”</i>
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	The Committee is asked to • Note the contents of the report.
3.0	Main report
3.1	Dog fouling and irresponsible dog ownership go hand in hand and can impact the quality and amenity of our neighbourhoods. Clearly, whilst the majority of dog owners exercise responsible dog management, there are a small number of owners who have less regard for this and this can have an impact on areas in the city. This requires on going re direction of our resources to address in terms of its removal from the streets, as well as providing a wide range of education and awareness programmes together with the use of fines where infringements are detected.
3.2	Councils are required to provide the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) with statistical information on a wide range of dog control service areas for example: dog licences, complaints regarding stray dogs, dog attacks and dog warden enforcement actions. This information is provided by Councils on a quarterly basis, collated and held by DAERA. It is then referred to by Councils and DAERA when providing responses to dog related information requests from the media, the public and animal welfare stakeholders. https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/council-dog-summary-statistics
3.3	The Dog Warden Service as part of their role deploy routine monitoring patrols, to detect dog fouling incidents, however, it is widely recognised that the problem of dog fouling cannot be addressed solely by enforcement intervention. Members will also be aware that an important role of the Dog wardens is carrying out other statutory investigative work related to attacks and complaints around this. Our dog wardens also respond to complaints for

	example straying, licencing issues, noise issues and how dogs are managed in open spaces. To encourage a change in behaviour, a wider programme supporting responsible dog ownership is an essential element of the Council's approach to reducing levels of dog fouling throughout the city. This report summarises the activities undertaken by the Community Awareness Team and the Dog Warden Service to address the issue of dog fouling. Community Awareness 3.4 The Community Awareness Team have a project plan detailing a range of activities through educational, promotional and community based programmes scheduled throughout the course of each year, which aims to highlight the problems of dog fouling, unfortunately due to COVID 19 restrictions, these programmes were curtailed. Dog Fouling Advertising Campaign 3.5 The latest advertising associated with the dog-fouling element of the council's Anti-Litter campaign ran in specific cycles from the w/c 9th June 2019 – 16 March 2020. A budget of £58,000 was allocated to marketing the anti-dog fouling message. The campaign utilises general activity throughout the whole of the council area, e.g bus T sides, commuter cards and radio. In addition, a targeted blitz was undertaken four geographical areas; North, South, East and West. This consists of newspaper advert, adshels, 48 sheets static and advan with the message "Dog Wardens are patrolling in (e.g south) Belfast". In addition, all cleansing vehicles are branded with the current campaign graphic reinforcing the fine for dog fouling, this allows for a consistent campaign message being delivered into our neighbourhoods throughout the year. Dog Fouling Campaign evaluation 3.6 Independent research undertaken by Cognisense in 2019 to evaluate the impact and awareness of the dog fouling campaign reported a very low incidence of individuals admitting to have allowed their dog to foul in the last six months. 70% of those asked said they had seen the campaign. The most prevalent area of recalled advertising was "£80 fine". This level of ad recognition is well in excess of the relevant UK awareness norm predicated with the media deployed during this most recent campaign. Overall prompted awareness was greater than seen in 2017. The side of buses execution was particularly prominently recalled (85%) as the place the advertising was seen. Younger respondents were most likely to recognise the dog fouling campaign advertising.
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	Community Awareness
3.7	The Community Awareness Team have a project plan detailing a range of activities through educational, promotional and community based programmes scheduled throughout the course of each year, which aims to highlight the problems of dog fouling, unfortunately due to COVID 19 restrictions, these programmes were curtailed
3.8	In late 2019 the Community Awareness Team launched the Green Dog Walkers project, which is a non-confrontational, voluntary, UK wide scheme to change attitudes towards dog fouling. On signing, individuals pledge to commit to the principles of good dog ownership. The team has worked with Dog Warden Service to ensure compliance with licensing requirements this has resulted in a number of unlicensed dogs being identified. This team will continue to promote this scheme in the work plan for 2021/22.
3.9	The Community Awareness Team attend a number of events and supported community fun days , 46 (2019-2020) in our parks and open spaces, reinforcing the anti-fouling message, this has included the use of our animated character Scoop Dog which have been very successful at engaging the community and encouraging responsible dog ownership. The Team have worked with the Dog Trust supporting them at their microchipping promotion sessions throughout the city, and provide our community centres with a supply of dog bags for members of the public, to further broaden the reach of our support our Responsible Dog Ownership Campaign.
3.10	In summer 2019 we offered 'litter game' sessions to community centre based summer schemes, this included dog fouling games to reinforce the dog fouling message and the consequence of noncompliance, 16 summer schemes participated in the project. We will continue to support the delivery of summer schemes in our community centres in 21/22. The Community Awareness Team provide our community centres with a supply of dog bags for members of the public to support our Responsible Dog Ownership Campaign.
	Education provision
3.11	The risks and consequences of dog fouling is included in all our school's workshops and specific projects. Covid 19 restrictions have hugely impacted on the delivery of our school programme but in 2019-20 the Team undertook 267 school visits. We are developing new ways of delivering our schools offer and have recently delivered our Christmas Elf story, which includes the issue of dog fouling, digitally to all Belfast's Nursery and Preschools.

3.12	We will also be commencing a dog fouling advertising campaign in conjunction with Corporate Communications on 18th January 2021. The service is also liaising with Legal Services to look at the potential for using stencils on the footpath as an awareness raising exercise. Dog Fouling Signage
3.13	We have continued the use of signage in areas where there appears to be an increase in the incidence of dog fouling in partnership with Open Spaces and Streetscene teams. The Community Awareness team are also working with local school communities to design banners to highlights the issue. Community Outreach Activities
3.14	These activities were impacted by COVID 19, but it is anticipated that they re-commence in 2021. Targeted Enforcement by The Dog Warden Service
3.15	This service was impacted by COVID 19 restrictions, but it was able to provide a presence in the City during lockdown and was fully recovered by August 2020.
3.16	The Dog Warden Service operates from 08.00 hours to 20.00 hours seven days a week and undertakes a range of legislative duties relating to dog control including stray dogs, dog attack investigations, dangerous dogs and dog fouling. The Team is organised on a geographical area basis to ensure that resources are targeted efficiently and effectively. This approach enhances Dog Wardens' local geographical knowledge of hot spot and problematic areas that can be targeted on a proactive basis, thus increasing opportunities to issue fixed penalty notices for dog fouling.
3.17	In order to enhance the patrols undertaken by the Dog Wardens, the following operational arrangements have been introduced: • The Dog Control Manager and the Dog Wardens will liaise with the Area Cleansing management teams and other enforcement staff in their respective areas to discuss priority areas and hotspots. • A structured area-working plan has recently been implemented to optimise resources to assist in improving targeted performance management. We are scheduling patrols most days and will undertake patrols at particular times, including early mornings and

evenings when resources permit in response to complaints and/or information that identifies a 'hot spot'.

- There has been an increased focus on signage throughout the city with all of the signage being updated and located in areas where dog-fouling hotspots are identified by the Cleansing Management teams.

3.18

Table showing Dog Enforcement statistics:

Year	15/16	16/17	17/18	18/19	19/20	1.4.20- 15.12.20
Fixed Penalties issued- Fouling	140	162	82	54	101	2
Summons issued Fouling	33	30	17	13	4	0
Fixed Penalties issued- Straying	581	599	384	387	328	13
Summons issued- Straying	201	212	120	126	81	0
Fixed Penalties issued- No licence	383	399	338	341	244	14
Summons issued- no licence	120	215	180	175	116	0
Total Dog Licenses issued	13,229	12,474	11,872	11,819	11,519	7,290

3.19

Use of DNA to assist dog fouling detections

Members have requested that officers consider the potential use of DNA testing of dog foul to determine ownership of dogs involved in cases of dog fouling. There is currently no legal requirement for dogs to be DNA tested, which costs approximately £50 per dog. The cost of testing DNA is in excess of £70 per sample and in the absence of any statutory requirement for all dogs to be DNA tested, this would be ineffective without a comprehensive data

	base. DNA testing has been used successfully in private gated communities but is deemed impracticable and expensive unless it became a statutory requirement. The Council have the option of writing to DAERA in respect of this approach as it would require a NI approach, the adoption of the necessary legislative framework and additional resource allocation to implement a system for management and monitoring that would need to be a cost not passed onto the rate payer. Financial & Resource Implications
3.20	There are no additional financial implications associated with the programme of work already planned in the revenue budget aimed at reducing levels of dog fouling through behavioural change and enforcement as it is delivered within existing budgets.
3.21	Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment There are no implications associated with this report
4.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
	None