

**COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
24 AUGUST 2023**

CONSULTATION ON RENEWAL OF DOG PUBLIC SPACE PROTECTION ORDER

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To seek members' views on the renewal of the Dog Public Space Protection Order (PSPO), which will be included in the Cabinet report following the consultation.

Summary

2. The current dog PSPO was introduced on 31 January 2021, and this is due to lapse in January 2024. As part of a review on the possible extension of the order, the Council must undertake statutory consultation as part of the review process. On 3 July 2023 Cabinet approved a period of consultation on the PSPO based on the existing order and that the outcome of the consultation and further analysis would be the subject of a future report to Cabinet that would consider the renewal of the PSPO. Attached at **Appendix 1** are copies of the draft PSPOs for dog control.
3. The majority of dog owners and walkers in Darlington behave responsibly. However, dog related anti-social behaviour (ASB) is still a concern to some residents, businesses and people who visit the Borough.
4. PSPOs were introduced in the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014. A PSPO is designed to deal with a particular nuisance or problem in an area. The behaviour must be having a detrimental effect on the quality of life of those in the community, it must be persistent or continuing and it must be unreasonable. The PSPO can impose restrictions on the use of that area which apply to everyone who is carrying out that activity. The orders are designed to ensure that the law-abiding majority can enjoy public spaces, safely and free from anti-social behaviour.

Recommendation

5. It is recommended that the Communities and Local Services Scrutiny Committee provide their views to Cabinet to be included as part of the consultation on the renewal of the Dog PSPO.

**Dave Winstanley
Group Director of Services**

Background Papers

Below is the link to maps of the proposed PSPOs for dog control.

<https://www.darlington.gov.uk/your-council/community-safety-team/civic-enforcement/dog-control/public-space-protection-orders/proposed-maps/>

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S17 Crime and Disorder	Introducing PSPOs for dog control will enable the authority to take action against individuals who do not look after their dogs responsibly.
Health and Well Being	PSPOs will impact on the Health & wellbeing of the community, making sure dogs are supervised responsibly.
Carbon Impact and Climate Change	There is no impact on carbon as a result of this report.
Diversity	Exemptions are available under PSPOs to some sections of the disabled community.
Wards Affected	All.
Groups Affected	The main impact on any protected characteristic as a result of introducing a Public Space Protection Order will be on residents with a disability who require an assistance dog. As detailed in the report, those individuals who have assistance dogs are excluded from certain offences under the PSPO.
Budget and Policy Framework	No impact on the Budget or Policy Framework.
Key Decision	No.
Urgent Decision	No.
Council Plan	PSPOs will contribute to safer Darlington.
Efficiency	There is no impact on the Council's Efficiency agenda as a result of this report.
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	There is no impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers as a result of this report.

Information

- Owning a dog can bring great happiness but also places a lifelong responsibility on the owner to ensure that the dog is not a hazard, a health risk, or a nuisance to other members of our community. Unfortunately, some owners do not take a responsible attitude towards dog ownership and as a result we receive a number of complaints each year covering a range of issues, such as noise nuisance from barking, uncollected dog faeces or out of control dogs. We need to balance the needs of those in charge of dogs with the interests of those affected by the activities of dogs, bearing in mind the need for people, in particular children, to have access to dog-free areas and areas where dogs are kept under strict control.

7. Currently the Council has in place Dog PSPOs that cover:
 - (a) Failure to remove dog faeces
 - (b) Not keeping a dog on a lead on specified land
 - (c) Not putting a dog on a lead and keeping on the lead when directed by an authorised officer
 - (d) Permitting a dog to enter land from which dogs are excluded
 - (e) Permitting dogs in cemeteries on a lead
8. The existing PSPO's for dog control come to an end on 31 January 2024 and if Members wish to continue to impose controls, then existing PSPO's require renewal and any other additions to dog control that arise from the public consultation will need to be considered.
9. Since the current PSPO's came into force, six fines have been issued for dog fouling, three fines issued for failing to keep a dog on a lead in a designated area and no fines have been issued in dog exclusion areas.
10. PSPOs are a key element of the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 which came into force in October 2014. The aim of a PSPO is to improve the enjoyment of public spaces for the majority of people and in respect of dogs reduce anti-social behaviour caused by dog fouling and nuisance dogs.
11. The responsibility for renewing existing PSPO's rests with the Council. The Council must, prior to making an order, be satisfied, on reasonable grounds, that activities carried out in a public space have had or are likely to have a detrimental effect on the quality of life of those in the locality and that the effect or likely effect of the activities:
 - (a) is or is likely to be persistent or continuing;
 - (b) is or is likely to be such as to make the activities unreasonable; and
 - (c) justifies the restrictions imposed.
12. Before making a PSPO, the Council must carry out consultation with the local Police, the Police and Crime Commissioner, the owners and occupiers of any land included in the PSPO which is not in Council ownership and wider consultation with representatives from the local community.
13. An offence involving failure to comply with a PSPO is punishable by a fine of up to £1,000 or by a fixed penalty of up to £100.
14. Any PSPO introduced would be for a 3-year period at which time it must be extended, or it would cease. The Council have the power to remove specific prohibitions or end a PSPO early, for example if an activity no longer existed. If significant new issues arose during the PSPO then the Council can vary prohibitions.

A future report to Cabinet would consider these matters and the outcome of consultation if approved.

15. A copy of the proposed PSPOs is attached at **Appendix 1**.

Equalities Implications

16. It is proposed to put in place exemptions for anyone with an assisted dog for all of the PSPOs with the exclusion of failure to remove dog faeces.
17. It is proposed to exclude registered blind individuals with an assisted dog and other disabled individuals who have mobility/dexterity issues and are unable to pick up dog faeces from this offence. Officers will obviously be able to apply common sense when enforcing PSPOs involving residents with disabilities.

Consultation

18. Cabinet have approved an 8-week consultation process that commenced in July, the outcome of which will be brought back to Cabinet for them to consider prior to implementing renewed PSPOs for Dog Control. The Council must consult with the following:
 - (a) Chief Officer for the Police area
 - (b) The area's Police and Crime Victim Commissioner
 - (c) Representatives of the public who it is believed will be affected by the restrictions, e.g. residents' associations or people who use the area
 - (d) The owner or occupier of the land
 - (e) Dog Law and Welfare Experts, e.g. vets, animal welfare officers
 - (f) Organisations affected by any restrictions
 - (g) In addition, the views of the Communities and Local Services Scrutiny Committee will also be reported to Cabinet as part of the consultation process.
19. Direct contact will be made with the relevant organisations to provide their feedback and an online survey will be introduced for residents generally to provide their feedback. The consultation will be advertised through social media, the Council's website, in One Darlington magazine and other appropriate channels to encourage as many residents as possible to take part in the consultation.