

ITEM 9 Responsible Dog Ownership Project Update

Report of the Housing and Environmental Health Portfolio Holder

Recommended:

That the Committee considers the progress of the Responsible Dog Ownership Project and the identified next steps.

SUMMARY:

- A progress update is provided on the implementation of the pilot involving parish councils to promote responsible dog ownership within their parish.
- A progress update is provided concerning the implementation of joint working with housing association Registered Providers (RPs) to promote responsible dog ownership on housing estates which include RP owned and managed properties.

1 Background

- 1.1 Following a proposal from the Lead Member for the Environment on the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, a review was undertaken of the Animal Welfare service provided by the Council in September 2013. The purpose of the review and policy was to improve transparency and understanding for all concerned. Animal welfare matters and in particular those pertaining to dogs, although small scale, are often high profile and can become time consuming for Members and officers alike. The expectation was that a clear policy document explaining the Council's statutory responsibilities and discretionary services and how this work is undertaken, would be beneficial for the public, Members and officers alike.
- 1.2 The review identified that some targeted work had been done with a number of Parish Councils in the past, to assist them tackle the irresponsible dog owners in their areas. This assistance had been at the request of the parish council and the support provided in accordance with their wishes. It was considered that this may not be the best use of the Council's resources as those Parish Councils requesting this service were not necessarily the ones where complaints had arisen.
- 1.3 The number of repeat sources of complaint involving irresponsible dog ownership was examined as part of the review. It was found that 28% of the repeat 'offenders' or sources of complaint were residents on housing estates which included RP owned and managed properties. Therefore, if by working with these organisations a reduction in this figure could be achieved there would be a potential reduction in the Animal Welfare Officer's workload and the opportunity to devote more time on other aspects of the role.

The Animal Welfare Officer had worked closely with RPs but there existed a degree of duplication in responding to the same complaints causing confusion and the inefficient use of resources so a more co-ordinated approach was considered to be beneficial to all concerned.

- 1.4 At the end of the review it was concluded that there was an aspiration considering the Council's very limited resources for this activity, targeted and more effective engagement with communities and key partners such as the RPs, would draw on external resources and reduce any duplication of effort. In addition the Animal Welfare Officer could be more proactive and support those parish councils who actually have a problem in their area and tackle it within their communities potentially reducing the number of complaints received by the Council.
- 1.5 A report on the review and its findings was presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Wednesday 6 November 2013 and the Committee recommended to Cabinet the following;
1. That the draft Animal Welfare Policy and Operational Guidelines be approved and disseminated widely.
 2. That consideration be given to making educational programmes on animal care in general available to the public.
 3. That a pilot scheme to promote responsible dog ownership in up to four parishes within the Borough, be undertaken. The pilot scheme to be used as a means of engaging with those communities and seeking the active involvement of parish councillors and residents in the initiative.
 4. The pilot scheme also to be used to determine any changes to the animal welfare education programme.
 5. That closer and more co-ordinated working arrangements with housing association Registered Providers (RPs) be developed, aimed at reducing the number of dog related complaints received by the Council in respect of the estates where RPs have a significant presence.

These recommendations (Item 6) were approved by the meeting of Cabinet on the 27 November 2013.

- 1.6 The first project update was presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 3 December 2014. At the meeting it was reported that the Council's Animal Welfare Policy had been published and that the project where it involved the housing association Registered Providers (RPs) was progressing well through regular meetings and information exchange. The Committee was advised that the project had been a success in Valley Park. The Lead Member explained that the project had been successful in this community as the parish council were on board with the project and as the project Champion she had worked closely with officers.

However it was reported that it was proving difficult to engage other parish councils to sign up to the pilot, despite a number of presentations or other approaches being made.

1.7 The Committee Minutes record the following;

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Resolved:

1. That the pilot continues and an evaluation report is brought back to the Committee in 12 months.
2. To continue to actively seek potential Parish Councils to participate in the pilot.
3. That further support and advice be given to Parish Council champions.
4. To continue to develop procedures to improve joint working with the Registered Providers.

2 Progress since December 2014 with the Parish Councils

- 2.1 Following the Committee resolution a new strategy for engaging parish councils was required; the use of presentations to individual parish councils did not appear to be delivering the required outcomes and appeared to be resource intensive. Therefore a change of approach was necessary. It was agreed that a Workshop should be provided on the theme of responsible dog ownership. All the parish councils in the Test Valley Borough Council area would be invited and the event would promote the project through presentations and workshop activities.
- 2.2 The Housing & Environmental Health Portfolio Holder sent a personal invitation to all the parish councils in the Test Valley area, welcoming representatives to attend a morning workshop on 5 September 2015 at Longstock Village Hall. Members of Test Valley Borough Council were informed of the event through the Members Information Bulletin. The Portfolio Holder's invitation was accepted by the Ampfield, Barton Stacey, Chilbolton, Hurstbourne Tarrant, Longstock, Stockbridge and Tangle & Hatherden parish councils and by the Andover Town Council.
- 2.3 The workshop was introduced by the Housing & Environmental Health Portfolio Holder with members of the Environmental Health team providing an overview of the Responsible Dog Ownership project. The Lead Member for the Environment on the Overview and Scrutiny Committee provided delegates with an insight on how the project could be introduced by giving an account of what had been done and achieved in the Valley Park Parish.
- 2.4 To provide extra interest and an opportunity for delegates to gain assistance from external organisations two guest speakers gave presentations;

- The Access Advisor from the Kennel Club speaking on, “Managing walkers with dogs in the countryside and green spaces” with a particular focus on examples of good practice.
 - The South England Education and Community Officer from the Dogs Trust describing, the role of the Trust and how it supports community events.
- 2.5 The event concluded with a round table discussion, chaired by the Corporate Director responsible for Environmental Health. All the delegates took this opportunity to participate, with questions being asked of the speakers and suggestions for implementing responsible dog ownership being proposed. There appeared to be an interest in the subject and a sharing of ideas.
- 2.6 It was important that the workshop should not be considered as an isolated event and that the interest engendered should be maintained. This has been achieved in a number of ways.
- All the parish councils which attended received documentation and suggestions on how they could start a Responsible Dog Ownership campaign within their parish. Each was provided with a Checklist (Annex 1 of this report) asking questions on the key areas for implementation - *Identifying the existence and extent of a dog fouling problem in the parish, raising awareness of the importance of responsible dog ownership, introducing dog access zones and methods of providing facilities for dog owners and the maintenance of such facilities*. In addition the recipients received a selection of articles which they could use in their newsletter or websites to launch the project and raise community awareness.
 - The interest expressed in presentations to schools, parish council meetings and community events was pursued. The Animal Welfare Officer has delivered a number of these, subject to the parish council’s requests, for Hurstbourne Tarrant and Stockbridge parish councils and for Andover Town Council. In addition Andover Town Council has been provided with the data requested on dog fouling complaints in the Andover Wards.
 - At the time of writing this report a progress meeting with the attending parish councils is being convened.
- 2.7 It would appear that progress has been slow but this has been due to the difficulties experienced in co-ordinating the 8 represented councils. The delegates who attended the workshop need to inform their respective parish councils about the project before any commitment can be made. Therefore the frequency of these meetings for each of the councils has given rise to some delay. It is hoped that a suitably convenient date, time and venue can be arranged before the end of March.

3 Progress since December 2014 with the Registered Providers

- 3.1 This aspect of the project has continued to progress well, building upon the work undertaken in 2014.
- 3.2 The Communication Agreement, signed up to in 2014, has facilitated the exchange of information, intelligence and procedures between the Environmental Health team and the respective RPs. Common approaches to the promotion of responsible dog ownership have been developed and agreed with the RPs using their residents' news letters, meetings and websites as a vehicle for supporting the work of the Council.
- 3.3 Common approaches to address dog related nuisance have also been facilitated. This process has involved the sharing of good practice and procedures not only between Environmental Health and the RPs but amongst the RPs themselves.

4 Measuring Success

- 4.1 The success of the workshop was evaluated by delegates being asked for feedback on the event in terms of the quality of the presentations, the round table discussions, the usefulness of the information provided and how well the event had encouraged the parish council to sign up to the project. The result was that 84% of the responses against these criteria were either good or excellent. Interest in the attending of future events was also gauged and found to be 100%.
- 4.2 Measuring the success of the workshop was straight forward but measuring significant outcomes for the project as a whole is not yet feasible. With a change in approach and the effective re-launch of the project for parish councils in September 2015 it is too early to draw any meaningful conclusions. It is difficult to assess whether the work undertaken with the participating parish councils has reduced the number of irresponsible dog ownership complaints in the respective areas. However complaints will continue to be monitored to see if a correlation can be made between any reduction in complaints and the implementation of the project.

5 Corporate Objectives and Priorities

- 5.1 Since the project began the Council's Corporate Plan 2015 - 2019, 'Investing in Test Valley', has been agreed. The project contributes to the Aim; Investing in a great place to *Contribute to and be part of a strong community*.
- 5.2 The participating parish councils and town council have an opportunity through their leadership to empower their communities by developing their own action plans and initiatives to tackle irresponsible dog ownership and address its consequences. At the same time they have access to assistance and support from the Environmental Health team of Test Valley Borough Council.

6 Resources

- 6.1 The first approach caused concern at the amount of resource which was being committed in attempting to engage the parish councils. However, as predicted the new approach has proved less resource intensive, particularly in terms of officer time.

7 Next Steps

- 7.1 The progress meeting is an opportunity to find out how the project is progressing in the participating parishes. It is also hoped that experience and ideas can be shared. The discussions at the workshop showed that besides assistance and guidance from the Environmental Health team, the practical experience and suggestions from those parish councils which have started to implement the project are of interest and use to other parishes as they all have common issues to overcome despite the differences in their character.
- 7.2 It is important to establish how useful the Check list is to the participants and to identify any refinements which can be made to improve its effectiveness as a project plan. At the same time the Environmental Health team needs to identify what further support needs to be provided or assistance offered, for example sources of signage, signposting or the provision of parish maps along with the services already offered such as attendance at community events and school talks.
- 7.3 The ultimate aim of this new approach is to produce a portfolio of project implementation plans which other none participating parishes could use in the future. The success at Valley Park already serves as an excellent model to other parish councils on how the project can be implemented but with the participation of different types of parishes other models can be developed. The work at Hurstbourne Tarrant and in Stockbridge is very encouraging in this respect as they are different types of parish compared to Valley Park.
- 7.4 The results of the pilots will be monitored and it is hoped through providing clear evidence of success and the portfolio of project implementation plans, other parishes will wish to become involved.
- 7.5 As regards the RPs the next area the Environmental Health Team and the RPs need to work together on is community events. There has been some ad hoc work in this area but there is a need to focus on targeted community engagement through presentations, dog fouling flagging events and through local schools.

8 Project Milestones for 2016

- The implementation of the project in the participating parish councils by 1 April 2016.
- Provision of a second Workshop by 1 November 2016

- The availability of project plans for use by non participating parishes by 1 December 2016.
- Time table of Community events agreed with the RPs by 1 June 2016
- Assessment of the potential controls facilitated through Public Spaces Protection Orders created under the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 by September 2016

<u>Background Papers (Local Government Act 1972 Section 100D)</u>			
None			
<u>Confidentiality</u>			
It is considered that this report does not contain exempt information within the meaning of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended, and can be made public.			
No of Annexes:	1	File Ref:	
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Report to:	Overview and Scrutiny	Date:	17 February 2016