

Introduction of a Voluntary Code of Practice for Professional Dog Walkers

Report by the Director for Communities

1.0 Summary

- 1.1 This report proposes to introduce a Voluntary Code of Practice for Professional Dog Walkers (PDW's) who are based within Worthing Borough and Adur District Council administrative boundaries.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 Currently the Council's Dog Warden Officers are aware of in the region of 50-55 PDW's businesses operating at any one time based across the Borough and District.
- 2.2 Presently there is no national licensing system that ensures that PDW's follow good practice and no legal framework matching the ones that are in place for Boarding Kennels and Pet Shops.
- 2.3 Both Councils receive formal complaints from time to time about PDW's. However, as there is no national licensing system, there is no way to enforce good practice unless there is a proven breach of one or more of the Dog Control Orders in place across the Borough and District.

Even then a one off fine may not affect or influence the PDW's working practices as there is no easy way for a member of the public (MOP) to know that a PDW has been fined.

This has resulted in a minority of PDW's who are lowering the public's view of their profession by failing to clean up after or properly controlling the dogs under their control whilst out in public places.

- 2.4 The aim of the proposed Voluntary Code of Practice is to introduce a "Code of Conduct" that will encourage all PDW's to follow best practice regarding the dogs under their care at all times, as well as setting a good example to members of the public exercising their own dogs.

- 2.5 A large number of other Local Authorities have already introduced a Voluntary Code of Practice for PDW's who operate in their area. The proposed Voluntary Code of Practice has been adapted and based on what Officers consider to be best practice taking into account research undertaken with other Local Authorities whilst compiling this report and the feedback received from the PDW's following a public meeting held on 28th June 2016.
- 2.6 The benefits of the scheme to the Councils are:
- To demonstrate to the local community that the Councils are acting positively to improve the wellbeing, enjoyment and safety of everyone using the Parks and Open Spaces in our Borough/District.
 - To reduce the number of complaints received from the public in relation to PDW's.
 - To encourage PDW's to act responsibly and demonstrate their professionalism.
 - To provide greater confidence in the standard of PDW's who sign up to the scheme.
- 2.7 A public meeting was held at Worthing Town Hall on 28th June 2016 with invitations sent out to all known PDW's operating in Adur & Worthing.
- 2.8 Over 40 PDW's attended, alongside both Executive Members for Environment and Council Officers.
- 2.9 There was overwhelming support from the PDW's in attendance in favour of introducing the scheme, as they were also very keen on voluntarily improving the public perception of their industry.
- 2.10 Comments were received from the PDW's on the proposed Code of Voluntary Practice which after consideration have now been included in the proposed Voluntary Code of Practice (Appendix 1).
- 2.11 It is proposed that Dog Warden Officers annually check that PDW's are adhering to the proposed code. Where PDW's are found to be in adherence they will retain scheme membership and therefore have a higher chance of gaining additional employment. Should PDW's fail to follow the code they will be excluded from the scheme, thereby reducing the prospects of their selection for future employment by the public.
- 2.12 To gain maximum publicity and awareness, it is proposed to develop a strong branding and high profile launch of the scheme with the support of the Head of Communication's team.

3.0 Proposal

- 3.1 To introduce a Voluntary Code of Practice for Professional Dog Walkers (PDW's) who operate within Worthing Borough and Adur District Council geographical boundaries.

- 3.2 To review annually the merits and benefits associated with running this voluntary scheme.

4.0 Legal

- 4.1 There are minimal legal implications as a result of the outcome of this report. It should be noted however that there is currently no legal obligation on PDW's to enter into the code of practice proposed. Compliance will be voluntarily and any enforcement action against a PDW would be as a result of any failure to comply with local byelaws, public space protection orders, or other national legislation governing the wellbeing and treatment of animals arising out of a breach of the code.

5.0 Financial implications

- 5.1 There is a minimal financial implications associated as a result of this report. It is estimated that set up and running costs of the proposed scheme would be less than £500.00 per annum. It is intended to absorb this sum from within the Dog Warden's revenue budget.

6.0 Recommendation

- 6.1 **That the Executive Members for the Environment approve the introduction of a Voluntary Code of Practice for Professional Dog Walkers (PDW's) who operate within Adur District & Worthing Borough Councils geographical boundaries.**

Local Government Act 1972 Background Papers:

Appendix 1 : Proposed Voluntary Code of Practice for Professional Dog Walkers

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Schedule of other matters

1.0 Council Priority

- 1.1 The proposed scheme helps to contribute to the Council's aim of working in partnership with representatives of the local community to help shape front line services.

2.0 Specific Action Plans

- 2.1 There is no specific action plan associated with this report.

3.0 Sustainability Issues

- 3.1 Matter considered and no issues identified.

4.0 Equality Issues

- 4.1 Matter considered and no issues identified.

5.0 Community Safety Issues (Section 17)

- 5.1 Matter considered and no issues identified.

6.0 Human Rights Issues

- 6.1 Matter considered and no issues identified.

7.0 Reputation

- 7.1 Implementing the Code of Practice if approved, will help to contribute to protecting the Council's reputations through encouraging responsible dog ownership across Adur & Worthing.

8.0 Consultations

- 8.1 Consultation was carried out with the Professional Dog Walkers, who operate in Adur & Worthing and have helped to shape the proposed Code of Practice.

9.0 Risk Assessment

- 9.1 Matter considered and no issues identified.

10.0 Health & Safety Issues

- 10.1 Matter considered and no issues identified.

11.0 Procurement Strategy

- 11.1 Matter considered and no issues identified.

12.0 Partnership Working

- 12.1 Council Officers have worked in partnership with local Professional Dog Walkers, whose feedback has helped to shape the Code of Practice.



Voluntary Code of Practice for Professional Dog Walkers (PDW's)

As a member of the above scheme, I agree that I and my staff shall at all times whilst working:

1. Ensure our charges do not cause harm, nuisance or disturbance to members of the public including keeping them on a lead until safely clear of the unloading area.
2. Treat our charges humanely, causing no harm or suffering, either physical or mental.
3. Be aware of our charges actions and behaviour at all times.
4. Hold public liability insurance for a minimum of £5million
5. Be aware of and comply with all laws, including bylaws, local laws, Public Space Protection Orders and any other regulations regarding our charges, noting that these laws will change according to the geographical area we are working in.
6. Have the contact details of our business attached to all dogs while in our care to assist a lost dog to be returned
7. Only use vehicles that are suitable for safe animal transportation. Such vehicles should:
 - 7.1 Be road legal with correct insurance, MOT and vehicle tax.
 - 7.2 Have adequate space, security and ventilation.
 - 7.3 Ensure animals are not able to interfere with the driver or able to leave the vehicle while it is moving.
8. All PDW's should have a good knowledge of dog behavior and body language and should be strong enough to control our charges.
9. Be qualified in Animal First Aid and carry an appropriate First Aid kit in any vehicle

...and that it would be desirable to:

10. Be recognisable to the public with either an identity card or clothing marked with the business name of the Professional Dog Walking Company.