

Consultation for Registration and Code of Conduct for Commercial Dog Walkers

Licensing Committee

Date: 6th July 2017

Author: Licensing Manager

Wards: All

Parishes Affected: All

1. Purpose and Reasons

- 1.1 To consider a Code of Conduct for Commercial Dog Walkers.

2. Recommendations

The Committee is recommended to:

- 2.1 Agree to a period of consultation with the public and relevant organisations on the proposed Code of Conduct for Commercial Dog Walkers.
- 2.2 For the results of the consultation exercise to be brought back to a future Committee.

3. Detail

- 3.1 Swindon Borough Council is fortunate to have a large number of parks and open spaces which are enjoyed by residents and visitors alike.
- 3.2 It is recognised that these spaces are also used by commercial enterprises such as professional dog walkers.
- 3.3 Although the Council does not wish to discourage small businesses, it is noted that there has been a steady increase in commercial dog walking in the Borough's parks and open spaces over the last couple of years.
- 3.4 Most commercial dog walking establishments are professionally run without incident but occasional complaints or queries have been received, generally regarding the number of dogs being walked or the dogs exiting vehicles.
- 3.5 Currently commercial dog walking is not covered by any national legislation so is not a licensable activity. The level of complaints generally received is not considered enough to meet the threshold for introducing restrictive measures such as Public Spaces Protection Orders.
- 3.6 The calls received are generally from members of the public asking how to find a dog walker and what things to look for. A request for some kind of registration was also raised as part of the recent consultation for the Animal Welfare Charter.

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- 3.7 In order to promote best practice and quality assurance it is suggested that a voluntary registration for commercial dog walkers with a code of conduct be introduced.
- 3.8 This would be similar to a successful regime introduced by Edinburgh Council in 2013. In this scheme commercial dog walkers had to register in order to be able to use the parks and open spaces in the city.
- 3.9 It is, however, felt that at this time a less restrictive approach would be appropriate given the low level numbers of complaints. This would encourage professional dog walkers to sign up.
- 3.10 Professional dog walkers can provide an invaluable service to dog owners and set a positive example to other dog walkers.
- 3.11 A list of those that have signed up to the scheme and promised to abide by the code of conduct can made available to the public.
- 3.12 A draft Code of Conduct is attached at Appendix 1 of this report. It is proposed that this document forms the basis of targeted consultation which should run for 6 weeks and commence as soon as possible.

4. Alternative Options

- 4.1 The Council could chose not to consult on this Code of Conduct, but this would not assist in reducing potential conflicts and complaints raised around the issue,

5. Implications, Diversity Impact Assessment and Risk Management

Financial and Procurement Implications

- 5.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from the report. Any small costs incurred in association with this consultation will be covered by licensing budgets.

Legal and Human Rights Implications

- 5.2 Legal and Human Rights considerations have been taken fully into account in compiling this report. It is considered that the recommendations of this report are compatible with Convention Rights. The Council is required to comply with the statutory provisions referred to in the report. All other legal and human rights implications have been considered in the preparation of this report.

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All Other Implications (including Staff, Sustainability, Health, Rural, Crime and Disorder)

- 5.3 There are no other implications

Diversity Impact Assessment

- 5.4 A DIA has been completed and is available on request

6. Consultees

- 6.1 The Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer) and Director of Law and Democratic Services (Monitoring Officer) are consulted in respect of all reports.

7. Background Papers

- 7.1 None

8. Appendices

- 8.1 Draft Code of Conduct for Commercial Dog Walkers

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Appendix 1

Draft Code of Conduct for Commercial Dog Walkers

With large numbers of dogs, professional walkers have the potential to cause a significant and negative impact on the park environment and the enjoyment and safety of other users.

By subscribing to the following code of conduct, professional walkers can minimise this impact, set a positive example to other dog walkers and deliver a safe and quality service for their clients.

Commercial dog walkers acting in the Borough of Swindon agree to:

1. Abide by all dog related legislation including but not restricted to the Dogs (Fouling of Land) Act 1996, Dogs Act 1871, Dangerous Dogs Act 1991, Protection of Livestock Act 1953, Animals Act 1971, Antisocial Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 and Animal Welfare Act 2006
2. Minimise the impact that exercising multiple dogs could have on other park users. Quiet parks, or quiet areas within parks, should be used over busy parks and spaces near children's play areas. Parks with sensitive wildlife areas should be avoided as well as care taken to not disturb nesting birds and other wildlife.
3. Take extra care when arriving and leaving parks and greenspace to minimise issues for other users. All dogs should be walked away from and returned to the vehicle on a lead.
4. Provide public liability insurance cover for their service.
5. Only exercise the number of dogs that are covered by their insurance policy, typically this is no more than 6 dogs.
6. Have a good knowledge of dog behaviour and reliable skills in training and handling dogs. The Council encourages the use of positive reinforcement methods as universally endorsed by behaviourists, charities and veterinarians.
7. Be respectful of other park users and their feelings towards dogs.