DANGEROUS DOGS AND DOG FOULING

REPORT
OF THE SUSTAINABILITY REVIEW COMMITTEE

London Borough of Islington

April 2007
FOREWORD FROM THE CHAIR

In a small, crowded borough like ours, the way in which each of us behaves can have a great effect on our neighbours. Add four-legged friends into the mixture and life can get even more difficult if we get it wrong.

Roughly one in five households owns a dog. Each dog can produce up to half a tonne of faeces in a lifetime. In addition, dogs have sharper teeth than humans – and are good at biting, barking and snarling.

So why one earth do people keep them? There must be a good reason. Because a dog is man’s best friend? And vice-versa?

Our task was to find out what makes Rover or Suzie a man’s best friend and how to help them become friendly and socially responsible to the rest of us – and to other dogs!

That’s why we were very interested to learn about the “socialisation” of young dogs, and have included a strong recommendation that this should be promoted more.

In terms of dog fouling, we recommend a practical as well as a legal approach. There are many dog owners who still don’t clear up after their pets – what we are recommending is that we should adopt a three-part approach:

• Communicate Explain to owners how to clean up and why.
• Facilitate Make it easier to clean up.
• Legislate Back it up with our new enforcement powers.

Acknowledgements/thanks

I would like to thank all those people from outside the Authority who kindly contributed their time and expertise to our project, in particular the Dogs’ Trust, the Metropolitan Police Authority and Homes for Islington.

Thanks go too to our officers, particularly in the Democratic Services team and Joe Clarke, the Council’s Animal Warden, and to those committee members who came on our visit to the Dogs’ Trust.

Councillor Wally Burgess
MEMBERSHIP OF THE SUSTAINABILITY REVIEW COMMITTEE

Councillors:
Wally Burgess (Chair)                                Barbara Smith (Vice Chair)
Michael O’Sullivan                                  Anna Berent
Lisa Spall                                          Tracy Ismail
James Murray                                        Emily Fieran-Reed
Katie Dawson

Substitutes:
Mouna Hamitouche                                    Kelly Peasnell
Gary Doolan                                         Julia Williams
Paul Smith                                          Ruth Polling
Richard Watts                                       Fiona Dunlop

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
The sustainability review committee would like to thank all the groups and individuals who assisted the scrutiny process and helped to shape the recommendations in the report.

OFFICER SUPPORT

Scrutiny & Democratic Services:                    Gareth Jenkins
Greenspace and Leisure:                             Bob Gilbert
THE COMMITTEES RECOMMENDATIONS

Promoting Education and Awareness

1. The Council should create an additional animal welfare post.

2. The committee feels that it is important that both education and enforcement are used to tackle both dog fouling and the issue of dangerous dogs. The Council should identify hotspots for these problems and carry out enforcement action. Any action taken should then be publicised to act as a deterrent, and all enforcement measures should be backed up with education emphasizing the need for responsible dog ownership. This to be supported by dog training events and classes.

3. The Council should devise an effective communications plan to promote more responsible behaviour amongst dog owners and to raise awareness of the new powers introduced by the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act. The committee feels that it is important to involve children in this as they can influence parent’s activities. This should be accompanied by notices in parks outlining what behaviour was expected of people walking dogs and who problems should be reported to. There should also be guidance on the use of proper dog waste bags.

4. Consideration should be given as to how best to educate children about how to behave around dogs. The Council should consider how best to start dialogue between young dog owners, dog experts and residents on estates. This dialogue should be supported by an education campaign on dog behaviour; large dogs playing together can seem threatening, and is often reported as dog fighting.

5. The Council should develop a dedicated web page to promote responsible dog ownership, along with the production of responsible dog ownership guidelines

Strengthening Enforcement

6. The Council should explore the use of acceptable behaviour contracts to control irresponsible dog ownership.

7. The Council should consider making a dog control order designating an unfenced children's play area as dog free in all parks in the borough.

8. The Council should ensure that monitoring of the strategy takes place to ensure effective implementation, including the number of fixed penalty notices issued. The sustainability review committee would like to play a role in this.

9. The committee noted the difficulties with prosecuting cases involving dog attacks/dangerous dogs, as people are often reluctant to give evidence. The Council should investigate ways of dealing with this, such as through the use of professional witnesses and mobile CCTV
Developing a Joined-up Approach

10. The Council should liaise with partner organisations, including local vets, to inform dog owners of the benefits of socialisation classes.

11. The Council should liaise with Homes for Islington and other registered social landlords to increase the enforcement of tenancy agreements governing the number of pets to deal with cases of dog related nuisance.

12. The Council should carry out outreach work to share good practice with partner agencies, including the police and registered social landlords.

13. The committee recommends that the Council lobby government in support of ‘deed not breed’, rather than legislations singling out certain breeds.

14. The Council should employ a coordinated, multi-agency approach to dealing with enforcement of dog-related offences, stray and dangerous dogs, and work closely with Homes for Islington and the Safer Neighbourhood Teams.

15. The Council should work with the police, Homes for Islington and registered social landlords to make full use of the powers available under the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act to issue fixed penalty notices and to identify persons issued with FPNs.

16. The Council should identify a lead department to coordinate interdepartmental and interagency dog strategy. The committee feels that this role should fall to a senior officer within either Greenspace or Street Management.

17. The Council should carry out high-level liaison with the Metropolitan Police to ensure that problems with dangerous dogs are dealt with effectively.

Disposal

18. The Council should stop the use of specific dog waste bins and use litterbins, accompanied by appropriate signage, as the means to dispose of properly bagged dog waste. Parks without litterbins are to be assessed on a case by case basis during implementation. This measure should be supported by an increased supply of free dog waste bags during the transitional period. These bags should be biodegradable with tie handles. Suitable litter bins would be provided in parks and open spaces where there were currently no litter bins.
1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Overview Committee approved the priority topics for scrutiny at their meeting on 15th June 2006.

1.2 The Overview Committee agreed that the Sustainability Review Committee should undertake a scrutiny into dangerous dogs and dog fouling.

2. OBJECTIVES

2.1 To review the impacts of dangerous dogs and dog fouling on the borough and to identify the most effective actions in dealing with them.

2.2 The objectives of the review were as follows:

- To review the extent and impact of the problem within Islington as well as in a number of comparable local authority areas elsewhere
- To review existing legal provision
- To assess a range of actions taken on dog fouling in other areas
- To review the most effective approaches to enforcement issues
- To review the most effective approaches to education and awareness raising
- To develop an integrated approach between different Council services, Homes for Islington and other agencies.

3. METHODOLGY AND TIMETABLING

3.1 Following the agreement of the Scrutiny Initiation Document (SID) officers designed a work programme for the Committee to receive presentations and witness evidence at Sustainability Review Committee and visit a number of organisations and meet with a number of individuals.
4. THE COMMITTEES FINDINGS

Dangerous Dogs Act 1991

4.1 The Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 was introduced in response to a number of dog attacks, particularly on children. These incidents attracted widespread press coverage and caused widespread public concern over the keeping of dangerous dogs.

4.2 The act identifies four breeds in particular:

- Pit Bull Terriers
- Tosa
- Dogo Argentino
- Fila Brasileiro

as well as any other dogs “appearing…to have been bred for fighting or to have the characteristics of a type bred for that purpose”

4.3 The act states that anyone who owns a type of dog known as a pit bull terrier must have it neutered, and keep it muzzled and on a lead in public. If the act was successful, this clause should have led to pit bull types dying out in this country, which has not been the case.

4.4 The act also covers any dog that is out of control, but only applies if the animal is in a public place, or somewhere it should not be.

4.5 The inclusion of pit bull terriers in the act has been particularly problematic; pit bull is a type of dog covering a number of breeds, rather than a particular breed. This can make it hard to identify dogs correctly, and there has been much debate over whether dogs are pit bull types or not.

4.6 The act has been described by some as a piece of rushed legislation and in January 2007 was included in public responses to a Radio 4 poll of unpopular UK legislation.

4.7 As this review was being carried out, the issue of how to deal with dangerous dogs was once again in the spotlight, following two particular incidents; the death of a five month old girl in Leicester following an attack by two Rottweilers (a breed not named by the act), and the death of a five year old girl in Merseyside after being mauled by a pit bull type dog. The Metropolitan Police assessed the dog involved in the latter case and confirmed that it was a pit bull terrier type.

4.8 Following the Merseyside attack, Merseyside Police held a week-long dangerous dogs initiative. During this time, the police received 603 enquiries, and took in 86 illegally held dogs.
Deed not Breed and Dog Behaviour

4.9 Many dog experts feel that it is wrong to criminalize a dog just because of its breed, and that all breeds were potentially dangerous if trained incorrectly (deed not breed).

4.10 The committee discussed this matter with Joe Clarke, Islington Council’s Animal Welfare Officer. Islington Council already promoted the idea of deed not breed. The Dangerous Dogs Act criminalized breeds unnecessarily, and was also difficult to enforce – the committee heard that experts differed over what made a dog a pit bull type. The committee heard that the legislation also confused members of the public, and the Council often dealt with complaints about pit bull types, where the offending dog in fact belonged to a legal breed, such as Staffordshire bull terrier.

4.11 The committee heard that the Dogs Trust, the Kennel Club and the Metropolitan Police also supported deed not breed.

4.12 The committee heard that aggression in dogs was generally motivated by fear, and was a device to create distance. The dog would put on an aggressive display, and only attack if a person entered the dog’s personal space. It was a misconception that the dog was protecting its owner – generally, the dog would not flee if held on a lead. If the lead was dropped, most dogs would run away. The committee heard that there were exceptions to this behaviour; some dogs would stand up straight and lean forward, signifying that they were ready to attack.

4.13 NHS figures show that 4,133 people were admitted to hospital last year suffering dog bites. More than a fifth were children under nine. The committee feels that thought needs to be given to how best to educate children about interacting with dogs.

Dog Breeding

4.14 The committee heard that the Dangerous Dogs Act had intended to prevent the breeding of pit bull types, killing out the breed. This had not worked, and there are probably more pit bull types in the UK now than when the act had been put in place. Current legislation meant that someone could own five bitches without needing to register as a breeder. This made it easy for amateur breeders. Some people did not get their dogs neutered as the puppies were a good source of income, with certain breeds going for between £500 and £1500. The Dogs Trust also highlighted this as a problem. To counter it, the Dogs Trust ran a scheme where people who got free treatment for their dogs had to have them neutered for this treatment to continue. The Dogs Trust also publicised neutering as part of a health check scheme for dogs.

4.15 Rottweilers are more easily identifiable than pit bull types, but with approximately a quarter of a million Rottweilers in the UK, any legislation would be difficult to enforce.

4.16 The equivalent act in Northern Ireland covered ten different breeds, and this was an approach that could be taken here.
Socialisation of Dogs

4.17 The committee heard that socialisation classes for puppies were important. These classes took place at 8-16 months. What dogs experience early on proofs them for life, and getting a puppy used to being in the company of other dogs made it less likely to attack them. Socialisation could take place outside this period, but was less effective. At this age, dogs needed to be taught bite inhibition – this was where they went to bite people, but either hit with clenched teeth or pulled out of the bite. After this period, dogs developed full canine teeth, and could cause more damage. The committee felt that mandatory socialisation classes for dogs would put an end to a lot of dog-related anti-social behaviour. Use of tenancy agreements was one way of making sure that people took their dogs to socialisation classes.

4.18 The committee heard that some vets did not promote socialisation classes as they recommended that dogs should not mix at an early age until their vaccinations were complete. One way round this problem was to hold classes in veterinary surgeries, and the Council was working to promote this.

4.19 The committee heard that certain breeds of dog, such as Staffordshire bull terriers, were popular amongst young people in Islington. Books on Staffordshire bull terriers usually advised that the dog was good with people, but did not mix well with other dogs. This led owners to keep their dogs away from other dogs, meaning that they did not become socialised, and reacted adversely to the presence of other dogs. This reaction was often perceived as dog fighting by witnesses, and reported as such. The committee felt that it was important to try and start a dialogue between young dog owners on estates, residents, and dog experts, to try and deal with problems such as this. The committee was encouraged to hear from the Council’s animal welfare officer that he carried out a lot of work with young dog owners, and that they were often passionate about their dogs, and receptive to advice.

Dog Fighting and the use of Dogs in Crime

4.20 The committee heard that formalised dog fighting was mostly a problem in south London, particularly in the Battersea area. New legislation would increase the range of penalties for dog fighting, making it illegal to attend a dog fight, take part in one, own the premises being used along with a number of other offences. A large proportion of fighting dogs were bred abroad, with a large amount of dogs being imported from India, The committee heard that closer liaison between Defra, the Home Office and the police was needed to prevent this.

4.21 “The Use of Dogs in Crime”, a report by the Metropolitan Police, shows a 74 percent rise in the number of dogs being stolen across the London area in the last year, from 239 to 417. A large number of puppies are being stolen. Staffordshire bull terriers make up 56 percent of all dogs stolen. The report suggests that some of these dogs are being stolen to assist with crimes, although it does acknowledge that more research is needed.

4.22 In Islington, there were 7 incidents involving dangerous dogs in 2003/04, with 31 in 2004/05 and 16 in 2005/06. For the year to date, there had so far been 22 reported incidents. These incidents were covered by the Dangerous Dogs Act and the Dogs Act 1871.
The Council had dealt with 76 cases under the Dangerous Dogs Act, particularly the section covering dogs out of control in a public place. However, the Council had been unable to prosecute anyone; victims and witnesses were often reluctant to give evidence. 16 of these 76 cases involved dog on dog aggression, which was not covered by the act. The Council could prosecute on the grounds that the dog was out of control in a public place, but courts were often reluctant to act on one incident. Out of 22 bite incidents, Staffordshire bull terriers were involved in 12. A range of other breeds, including Chihuahua, Labrador and Yorkshire terrier were involved in the others. The committee felt that it was important to consider ways of increasing the number of prosecutions for such offences.

Dangerous dogs are also used to protect crack houses against police raids – dealing with a dog slowed the raid down, allowing dealers time to dispose of drugs and to leave the premises.

The Metropolitan Police report also looked at figures for dogs used to commit crimes such as mugging. During the period from 1 April 2005 to 31 March 2006, 49 crimes were identified where the suspect was accompanied by a dog. Of these reports, only 24 involved the dog having any sort of role in the crime. Because of the way such crimes are recorded, some crimes may have been missed.

Muzzling Dogs

Under the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991, the breeds named in the act needed to be muzzled in public. The committee heard that this could cause problems. Dog muzzles needed to be fitted correctly to be effective, and as they changed the dog’s appearance, could single a dog out for attack by other dogs. People often perceived that muzzled dogs were dangerous.

Stray Dogs

The police currently took in all stray dogs that were handed in at police stations, but did not deploy to pick up reported strays. The police currently took in approximately 50 stray dogs a week across the London area. These were kennelled at Battersea dogs home, which was expensive. The Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act moved responsibility for dealing with strays to local authorities. Islington was well placed to do this as it had its own modern kennel facility.

The police are responsible for kennelling dangerous dogs. Generally, about thirty to forty dangerous dogs are kennelled at any one time, although this could rise dramatically if a number of puppies were seized. The police reviewed each case, and encouraged the courts to come to a decision as quickly as possible.

Dog Ownership and Social Housing

Current Islington tenancy agreements allow for one pet to be kept. Whilst enforcement of this condition can be a useful way of dealing with dog related anti-social behaviour, the committee heard from the Dog Trust that dog ownership could be beneficial to the elderly or infirm. Having a pet reduced stress and could also encourage people to take exercise.
5. **DOG FOULING**

**Extent**

5.1 In January 2005, responding to a Council survey, 45 percent of respondents identified dog fouling as the local environmental issue that caused them the most concern.

5.2 Globally, about 3.3 million tons of dog dung is produced annually. In the UK, eight million domestic dogs produce 1000 tons of dog dung each day. The majority of this is uncollected by dog owners, and left in parks, highways and housing land.

5.3 In Islington, dog excrement on highways is swept up and collected with general refuse. There are currently 180 separate dog bins in parks, emptied weekly, at a total cost of £27,500 per annum. Dog excrement can disposed of in ordinary litterbins that are emptied daily rather than weekly. A number of other boroughs had adopted this approach successfully. There are particular problems on housing estates, especially where areas of land become unofficial dog toilets, and are not cleared. This affects residents and Council staff who have to maintain the land.

**Impact**

5.4 Dog fouling impacts on health and biodiversity and causes loss of amenity. The committee heard that a 1973 study estimated that dog faeces in the UK produced 130 billion flies each year, in addition to the flies that feed on dog excrement.

5.5 Dog excrement also contains less visible organisms, such as salmonella, hydatid tapeworms, toxoplasmosis and the roundworm toxocara canis. Toxocara attacks the eyes and the brain, resulting in loss of sight. As toxocara is not a notifiable disease, the number of cases in Islington is not known.

5.6 Dog fouling in parks creates nutrient-rich soil. Flowers thrive in soil low in nutrients, meaning that parks and nature reserves become overgrown with weeds. This is a particular problem in parks where the Council is trying to cultivate wildflower meadows.

5.7 Dog fouling can render some parkland areas unusable for activities such as children’s play, sports and other leisure activities.

**Previous Attempts to Deal with Dog Fouling**

5.8 The Council has been carrying out campaigns against dog fouling for at least 20 years. About 12 years ago, the Council had made a film with Saatchi and Saatchi to encourage owners to clean up after their dogs. Ten years ago, the Council took the decision to designate the whole of the borough (apart from housing owned land) as a dog fouling free zone. This can be enforced by enforcement officers in street management and parks patrol, although this had proved difficult, with only one penalty notice for dog fouling being issued in the last year.
Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act

5.9 The Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act gives more effective powers to local authorities to tackle antisocial behaviour affecting the local environment. Councils can issue fixed penalty notices for dog offences, including dog fouling. Councils can also require dogs to be kept on a lead and restrict the number of dogs that can be walked by one person. The act also makes Councils responsible for dealing with stray dogs.

5.10 Generally, existing byelaws governing dog related antisocial behaviour will be replaced by dog control orders. Dog control orders cover five offences:

- Dog fouling
- Dogs not kept on leads
- Not putting and keeping a dog on a lead when so directed
- Exclusion of dogs from designated land
- The number of dogs one person can take onto land.

5.11 Fixed penalty notices up to £75 can be issued for any offence, and the courts can issue a maximum fine of £1000. People registered blind, deaf, or with disabilities necessitating the use of trained assistance dogs are exempt from this.

5.12 Dog control orders can be put in place on any land accessible to the public and open to air. The Council can only impose dog control orders as a necessary and proportionate response to any problems.

5.13 Existing byelaws remain in force until a dog control order is made covering the same offence, at which time the byelaw lapses. Local authorities can choose which officers carry out enforcement duties under the act. The committee felt that careful consideration needed to be given to who should be allowed to do this. The safer neighbourhoods policing teams have an important role to play in enforcement. Police community support officers can stop people and ask for their address, helping the Council identify offenders.

Enforcement and Education

5.14 The committee felt that it was important to work with dog owners to encourage responsible ownership, rather than taking a purely enforcement-based approach. Dealing with dog fouling means initiating a culture change.

5.15 The committee was pleased to hear that the Council was already using a mixture of education and enforcement to deal with dog fouling. Working with Groundwork, the Council had identified a number of dog fouling hotspots in the borough:

- Regent’s Canal West/Edward Square
- Rosemary Gardens
- St Luke’s Gardens
- St Paul’s South
- Whittington Park/Davenant Park
• Landseer Gardens
• Barnard Park
• Bingfield Park

5.16 Educational projects are currently carried out, mostly at primary schools. These look at dog fouling and animal behaviour. The committee felt that it was important to work with children as they could influence their parents’ behaviour. In classroom-based sessions, the children designed posters.

5.17 The Council also runs dog training sessions at each hotspot, delivered by Greenspace staff and the Council’s animal welfare officer. Dogs and owners could achieve a Kennel Club bronze award. This was also supported by a series of “Scruffs” dog shows in Islington parks, where training information was available.

5.18 Stories about dog fouling traditionally attract a lot of attention in the local media, reflecting residents concern on this matter. The committee felt that this should be used to publicise any enforcement that took place. This would reassure people that the problem was being taken seriously, and also let dog owners know that they had to clean up after their dogs.

Homes for Islington

5.19 Although housing land was not covered by existing byelaws, Homes for Islington (HfI) took part in a monthly dog fouling discussion group that attempted to coordinate responses to the problem across a number of agencies.

5.20 Under the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act, Homes for Islington staff will be able to carry out enforcement against offenders, and HfI was currently looking at which staff were best placed to do this. The act would also require land to be surveyed and categorised – land could be defined to allow for no dogs, control of dogs on a lead or have no restrictions. There were some inconsistencies in existing signage that needed to be addressed; a lot of housing land had signposts stating that exercising dogs was not allowed. However, tenancy agreements allowed for one household pet.
APPENDICES TO THE REPORT

APPENDIX A - Scrutiny Review Initiation Document

APPENDIX B - Witnesses and Organisations consulted during the course of the scrutiny review.
**SCRUTINY REVIEW INITIATION DOCUMENT (SID)**

**Review: Dog Fouling**

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<th>Scrutiny Review Committee: Sustainability</th>
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<td>Director leading the Review:</td>
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<td>Lead Officer: Bob Gilbert</td>
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**Objectives of the Review:**
To review the impacts of dog fouling on the borough and to identify the most effective actions in dealing with them.

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- To review existing legal provision
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- To review the most effective approaches to enforcement issues
- To review the most effective approaches to education and awareness raising
- To develop an integrated approach between different council services, Home for Islington and other agencies.

**How is the review to be carried out.**

1. Documentary submissions
   - Examples of dog fouling strategies from other local authorities
   - Information on dog fouling related diseases in the borough

2. Witness Evidence
   - Islington Council Street Management Division (Highways and Waste) Management
• Islington Council Greenspace Service
• Islington Parks Patrol (Jerry Gutwin)
• Public Protection re complaints about dogs/dangerous dogs
• St Georges Safer Neighbourhoods Team
• Police re dangerous dogs
• Dog Owners
• TRAs
• Residents/area committee meetings
• Islington Council Legal Services
• Homes for Islington and other registered social landlords
• Groundwork Islington
• Representative/s of appropriate animal welfare agencies – Dog Trust
• Representative/s of areas or organisations which have developed effective solutions

Additional Information:

Programme

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<tr>
<td>1. Scrutiny Initiation Document</td>
<td><strong>24 July</strong></td>
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<td>2. Timetable</td>
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<td>3. Interim Report</td>
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This SID has been approved by the Overview/Review Committee.

Signed: Chair
Date:
APPENDIX B

WITNESSES AND ORGANISATIONS CONSULTED DURING THE COURSE OF THE SCRUTINY REVIEW

THE DOGS TRUST

BOB GILBERT (LBI)
KATE BARLOW (LBI)
ABENA ASANTE (HFI)
ANDREW BEDFORD (LBI)

JAMES LITTLEWOOD (Groundwork)

SUPT. SIMON OVENS (Metropolitan Police)

JOE CLARKE (LBI)
GINA CLARKE (LBI)