



ConsultationResponse

Conwy County Borough Council: Public Space Protection Order - control of dogs

October 2023

RSPCA Cymru welcomes the opportunity to respond to Conwy County Borough Council's consultation on the proposed Public Space Protection Orders (PSPOs). PSPOs provide local authorities with a means of tackling dog fouling and other dog-related issues, such as access to public spaces. While RSPCA Cymru understands that local authorities have a duty to improve the communities they serve and protect human health, we would always urge any council to consider whether a PSPO is needed to achieve this. PSPOs risk punishing responsible dog owners for the actions of the less responsible, while potentially creating less spaces for dogs to exercise and express their natural behaviours. While PSPOs offer an effective means of tackling dog fouling via the use of Fixed Penalty Notices for those who fail to clean up their dog's mess, we would encourage a more flexible approach to other issues relevant to dogs as outlined below.

Dog fouling in public areas

RSPCA Cymru understands that dog fouling can be a major issue for towns and cities across Wales. In order to encourage responsible dog ownership and keep our communities clean and healthy for people, pets and wildlife, the RSPCA agrees that local authorities should require owners to clean up their dog's waste. We also support measures that require all dog owners to carry a bag or other appropriate means to pick up their dog's faeces on land listed within the order. As it stands, dog owners are currently able to put dog waste in the bins provided by the council. To encourage the use of these facilities, clear signposting to these bins, along with ensuring there are a sufficient amount of them available and that they are emptied regularly, is needed.

In 2020, the council introduced a PSPO for dog control in an attempt to target irresponsible owners. The previous PSPO set out conditions for dog owners to collect and dispose of dog faeces by removing it and depositing it in a bag, or other means of collection. All dog owners were also required to carry bags or other suitable means for collecting faeces. RSPCA Cymru believes similar ongoing action from Conwy CBC would encourage responsible dog ownership while facilitating more harmonious relationships between canine owners and the wider community.

Other dog-related issues

Conwy CBC's previous PSPO on dog control required owners to put their dog on a lead when requested by an authorised officer. To ensure that this condition is administered appropriately if continued, RSPCA Cymru believes the experience and knowledge of the officer imposing the condition should be sufficient enough to prevent dog welfare from being compromised. Consideration should always be made in terms of whether such an instruction is necessary, especially if there is no risk to the safety of people, the dog themselves or other animals, or if the dog is not out of control or causing alarm/distress.

Many dogs enjoy interacting with each other and other people, and it is important that dogs are able to express normal behaviour off the lead in the appropriate places. Being given an opportunity to be walked off a lead and being able to interact and play with new animals and people in an appropriate place is important in terms of ensuring a dog is well-socialised. Interaction with others is particularly important for puppies and younger dogs to ensure they develop into well adjusted adults. However, RSPCA Cymru recognises that not all dogs will be well-socialised and some may find other animals or people threatening, therefore not all places will be appropriate for time off-lead. For example, we are

fully supportive of all dogs being kept on leads in children's play areas, on school grounds when they accompany those picking children up and in cemeteries when providing comfort to their owners. However, we would encourage a more flexible approach towards dogs being allowed off-lead on council-owned land such as commons, fields, beaches and marked sports pitches; this sentiment also stands in relation to the extension of restricted places where dogs are to be excluded.

Areas such as marked sports pitches, beaches and fields can provide owners with the option to let their dog/s off lead responsibly when they are not busy, especially if adequate space is not available nearby. Additionally, we believe the existing provisions that make it an offence for an owner not to pick up their dog's faeces go some way to mitigating the issues associated with areas such as marked sports pitches, beaches and parks. We therefore always urge local authorities to consider this when deciding whether dogs need to be banned from these spaces. With the full exclusion of responsible dog owners on marked sports pitches and some beaches being both restrictive and limiting, the RSPCA would consider allowing dogs on leads a better proposal than a blanket ban. This is something that has been adopted by some other local authorities in Wales, with some considering this a sufficient means of tackling dog-related issues in their communities.

The proposal to extend the current PSPO and exclude dogs from additional spaces in and around Conwy - including Colwyn Bay beach - has proven controversial with a [walking protest](#) against this suggestion having taken place on September 10. With dogs already excluded from many public spaces in Conwy under the current PSPO, introducing new year-round bans on more spaces will leave dog owners with even fewer options. With this having the potential to compromise dog welfare, as well as the wellbeing of their owners, RSPCA Cymru encourages Conwy CBC to reconsider adding any further restrictions. Instead, we'd encourage an approach that seeks to tackle those who do not comply with the order, as opposed to punishing all responsible dog owners for the actions of the less responsible. With Conwy also being a popular tourist destination, consideration should be given as to how such restrictions will impact those holidaying with their dogs. With any new proposals having the potential to negatively inadvertently impact visitors as well as those who permanently reside in Conwy, it is important that this is taken into account.