



## Consultation response

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### Cyngor Gwynedd: Public Space Protection Order - Dog Control

RSPCA Cymru welcomes the opportunity to respond to Cyngor Gwynedd's review on the Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) relevant to dog control. 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 (FPNs) 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 communities across Wales. The RSPCA agrees that local authorities should require owners to clean up their dog's waste, and 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.

In 2021, 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, or by other means of collection. RSPCA Cymru believes similar ongoing action from Cyngor Gwynedd would encourage responsible dog ownership while facilitating more harmonious relationships between canine owners and the wider community. For this to be successful, it is important that adequate signage in place along with the provision of bins that are accessible and regularly emptied.

#### Other dog-related issues

Cyngor Gwynedd's previous PSPO on dog control required owners to put their dog on a lead when requested to do so 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.

RSPCA Cymru would encourage a more flexible approach towards dogs being allowed on council-owned land such as commons, fields 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 can provide owners with the option to let their dog/s off lead in a responsible manner when they are not being used, 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 mitigate the risks associated with areas such as marked sports pitches, fields and beaches.

Giving dogs 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 they are 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 and on school grounds when they accompany those picking children up. However, we would encourage a more flexible approach towards dogs being allowed to exercise in more spacious areas of council-owned land such as commons, fields, beaches and marked sports pitches.

Excluding dogs from the areas above could prove limiting and restrictive to responsible dog owners, especially those with accessibility issues. As such, we would encourage Cyngor Gwynedd to trial allowing dogs on leads in these areas in the coming years. This approach has been adopted by other local authorities which cover such spaces in Wales, with many considering this a sufficient means of tackling dog-related issues in their communities.