



# Consultation Response

## Monmouthshire County Council: Public Space Protection Order - control of dogs

November 2023

RSPCA Cymru welcomes the opportunity to respond to Monmouthshire County 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.

In 2021, Monmouthshire 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 Monmouthshire County Council would encourage responsible dog ownership while facilitating more harmonious relationships between canine owners and the wider community.

RSPCA Cymru would also urge the council to also look at further educational or promotional schemes around responsible dog ownership in areas or hot spots where dog fouling is a regular issue. Regular monitoring of these sites by authorised officers could also help contribute to a reduction in dog fouling complaints received by the local authority, as well as the provision of clear signage, if this is not in place already.

### Other dog-related issues

RSPCA Cymru recognises that requiring dogs to be kept on a lead on public roads and pavements can bring some benefits to the dog, especially by ensuring their safety and reducing the number of potential road traffic deaths. When requiring owners to put dogs on leads of no more than two metres length when asked by the appropriate officer, RSPCA Cymru believes the experience and knowledge of the officer imposing the condition should be suitably sufficient. This is to ensure that the condition is administered appropriately and prevent dog welfare from being compromised. It is our view that

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 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. It is therefore important that space is available for owners to let their dogs off lead in a responsible manner, where appropriate. 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 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 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 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, fields 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 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.