



Consultation Response

Neath Port Talbot Council: Public Space Protection Order - dogs exclusion from beach and leads on promenade

November 2023

RSPCA Cymru welcomes the opportunity to respond to Neath Port Talbot Council's consultations on the expansion of the proposed Public Space Protection Orders (PSPOs). PSPOs provide local authorities with a means of tackling 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 PSPOs around dog control are 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.

Under the proposed PSPOs, dogs will be excluded from part of Aberavon Beach from May 1 to September 30 every year. An additional PSPO sets out conditions for dogs to be on leads at all times on Aberavon Promenade during the same time period.

Exclusion of dogs on Aberavon beach and the requirement for dogs to be on leads on the promenade

RSPCA Cymru understands that irresponsible dog ownership can impact the quality of life within local communities - however, we encourage Neath Port Talbot Council to avoid limiting the number of places within the locality where dogs are allowed. Areas such as beaches can provide owners and dog walkers with an appropriate means of allowing dogs to exercise when these spaces are not overly busy. These spaces can prove invaluable to owners, dog walkers and visitors, especially if adequate space is not available nearby.

Giving dogs the opportunity to interact with new animals and people in an appropriate place is important in ensuring that a dog is well-socialised. This is particularly important in the development of younger dogs and puppies to ensure they become well-adjusted adults. However, RSPCA Cymru recognises that not all dogs are well-socialised and some may find other animals or people threatening, therefore not all places will be appropriate for dogs. This is why we are fully supportive of 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 on vast areas of council-owned land that are often empty such as commons, fields, marked sports pitches and beaches.

With dogs already excluded from many public places, additional bans and restrictions on places such as beaches will inevitably leave dog owners with even fewer options. An around the clock exclusion of dogs on a large part of Aberavon Beach for almost five months could be considered both restrictive and limiting to responsible owners, especially those with accessibility issues. Because of this, we would consider allowing dogs to be kept on leads on this part of the beach during busy times to be a better proposal than a blanket ban. This is something that has been adopted by some other local authorities which cover beaches in Wales, with some considering this a sufficient means of tackling dog-related issues in their communities.

With regards to the PSPO requiring dogs on leads when walking on Aberavon promenade, we would always call for consideration to be given in terms of whether such an instruction is necessary and needed, especially if there is no risk to the safety of people, the dog themselves or other animals. However, with areas such as promenades having the potential to be extremely busy during the summer months, the proposal to require dogs to be on leads appears to be measured and

proportionate in terms of protecting both human and animal welfare. With the promenade located in close vicinity to the area where dogs would be excluded from on Aberavon beach - with the promenade likely to have more people in a smaller space at times - we encourage Neath Port Talbot to consider allowing dogs on-lead on both the promenade and beach these PSPOs cover. With the beach likely to be less busy during certain times of the day, we would also question whether any restrictions should take this into consideration by allowing owners and their dogs access to this part of the beach during certain times of the day, should an on-lead approach not be favourable.