

Advice for local authorities

The Kennel Club is the only national organisation named by the Government as a body that local authorities should consider consulting when introducing restrictions on dog walkers. As the leading canine authority on dog access in both urban and rural areas, we advise and lobby local authorities on dog related issues, including Public Spaces Protection Orders (PSPOs).

Our core objective

Our goal is to ensure that any measures taken by local authorities are necessary, evidence-based and proportionate responses to problems caused by dogs and irresponsible owners. We believe that it is key that authorities seek to balance the interests of dog owners with the interests of other members of the community who may be affected by issues relating to irresponsible ownership, such as dog fouling.

The guiding principle by which we work is to pursue the least restrictive approach to achieve the desired reduction in problems associated with dogs. We do not oppose all restrictions on dog owners and dog access and seek to find a mutually agreeable outcome for a specific problem.

Proposed measures

When planning a public consultation or drafting a Public Spaces Protection Order, there are a number of measures which local authorities may consider including. Although we do not oppose all proposed measures, we strongly urge local authorities to ensure that measures contained within the Order are a proportionate and necessary response to an evidenced problem.

It is worth noting that the statutory guidance on PSPOs produced for local authorities by the Home Office states clearly that local authorities must provide restriction-free sites for dog walkers to exercise their dogs. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs also states that 'local authorities should ensure there are suitable alternatives for dogs to be exercised without restrictions. The ability for owners to meet requirements for providing their dogs 'regular opportunities to walk and run' is greatly affected by the amount of publicly accessible parks and other public spaces in the area where dogs can exercise without restriction.

Dog fouling

The Kennel Club strongly promotes responsible dog ownership and believes that dog owners should always pick up after their dogs. In areas where farm animals graze, preventing dog fouling is essential to reduce the risk of passing *Neospora* and *Sarcocystis* to cattle and sheep respectively.

We believe further proactive measures to help promote responsible dog ownership in the local area are an important addition to introducing measures relating to dog fouling. These could include: increasing the number of bins available for dog owners to use; communicating to local dog owners that used waste bags can be disposed of in normal litter bins; running responsible ownership and training events; or using poster campaigns to encourage dog owners to pick up after their dog.

Having the 'means to pick up'

Whilst we support proactive efforts on behalf of local authorities to encourage responsible dog ownership and to ensure that those who are not picking up after their dogs are held accountable, this has to be fair and proportionate. Proposals to introduce an offence of not having the means to pick up are concerning: responsible owners will usually have dog waste bags or other means to clear up after their pets. However, for example, if dog owners are approached at the end of a walk and have already used all of their available bags, or given a spare to another dog walker, this measure would unfairly penalise them for exhibiting behaviours encouraged by Green Dog Walker schemes.

Exclusions

We do not normally oppose Orders to exclude dogs from playgrounds or enclosed recreational facilities such as tennis courts or skate parks. It is important that alternative provisions are made for dog walkers in the vicinity to avoid displacement or the intensification of problems in nearby areas.

However, we will oppose PSPOs which introduce blanket restrictions on dog walkers accessing public open spaces without specific and reasonable justification. Dog owners are required to provide their dogs with appropriate daily exercise, including “regular opportunities to walk and run” – in most cases, this will be off the lead while still under control.

We do not believe that dogs should be excluded from cemeteries as they can provide essential comfort and support to an individual suffering from the loss of a loved one. We understand the importance of ensuring that dogs are under control in cemeteries, however, and would suggest that this be achieved with a dog on lead order rather than an exclusion.

Dogs on lead

The Kennel Club supports reasonable 'Dogs on Lead' Orders, which may include areas such as cemeteries, picnic areas, or on pavements in close proximity to cars and other traffic.

Dogs on lead by direction

We strongly welcome 'Dogs on Lead by Direction' Orders. These allow responsible owners to exercise their dogs off lead without restriction, providing their dogs are under control, whilst simultaneously giving the local authority powers to restrict dogs not under control.

We recommend that the authorised officer enforcing the Order is familiar with dog behaviour in order to determine whether restraint is necessary. There exists the possibility that a dog, through no fault of its own, could be considered a 'nuisance' or 'annoyance' to someone who simply does not like dogs.

We encourage local authorities to make use of more flexible and targeted measures at their disposal, including Acceptable Behavioural Contracts and Community Protection Notices. The Kennel Club Good Citizen training clubs and our accredited trainers can assist owners whose dogs run out of control due to them not having the ability to train a reliable recall.

Maximum number of dogs that one person can walk

An arbitrary maximum number of dogs that a person can walk is an inappropriate approach to dog control that will often displace and intensify problems in other areas. The maximum number of dogs a person can walk in a controlled manner depends on a number of factors relating to the dog walker, the dogs being walked, whether leads are used and the location where the walking is taking place.

If a maximum number of dogs measure is being considered due to issues arising from commercial dog walkers, we instead suggest that councils look

at accreditation schemes – as seen in places such as the East Lothian Council area. These can be far more effective than numerical limits as they can promote good practice, rather than just curb the excesses of one aspect of dog walking. Accreditation can also ensure that dog walkers are properly insured – which will typically cap the number of dogs that they can walk at any one time – and act as advocates for good behaviour by other dog owners.

Seasonal/time restrictions

Where a seasonal restriction is proposed, we suggest that local authorities consider whether a time restriction would be an appropriate addition. Many beaches are empty in the early mornings and late evenings, making this a key time for many dog owners to exercise their dogs. Beaches are an important local resources for owners to make sure their dogs get the required daily off-lead exercise and we see little reason why it should be restricted during times of the day when it is little used, even in the busy season.

We oppose restrictions which commence on Good Friday – or other dates linked to Easter – and continue to a set date in the autumn. As Easter can vary by up to 17 days, the dates of legally walking your dog in a particular area can drastically change over the years and catch dog walkers off-guard. Thus, we believe that any proposed seasonal restrictions should only be in place between 1 May and 30 September.

Playing fields

When seeking to restrict access to playing fields, local authorities should consider whether or not it is absolutely necessary. When they are not in use, they can be a vital resource for dog owners to ensure that their dogs get their required daily exercise. As such, time and/or seasonal restrictions may be more appropriate than a continuous exclusion order.

Compliance with playing field exclusions can be difficult for a dog walker if there are no boundaries around the playing field, given that dogs will not understand the difference between playing fields and other grassed areas.

Dog parks

While dog parks appear to be a positive solution for dog walkers, there are a number of drawbacks that should be considered. We have general reservations over the use of dog parks within the UK due to a significantly different culture of dog walking compared to North America and Australia, for example, where dog parks are more prevalent.

The high concentration of dogs in a small area can lead to an increased frequency in dog-on-dog attacks and other behavioural problems. If dog-on-dog or dog-on-human attacks and injuries arise from interventions like dog parks, liability concerns for councils and land managers can arise.

Signage and communication

Regardless of which measures are introduced, it is essential that local authorities launch an effective communication campaign in the area to ensure that dog owners are aware of any plans or changes. Appropriate signage must be erected to inform those who are not familiar with local rules, such as having the means to pick up, so that they are not unfairly caught out.

Regarding dog access restrictions, such as a 'Dogs on Lead' Order, appropriate signage should clearly state where such restrictions begin and end. This can be achieved with signs that say on one side 'You are entering [type of area]' and 'You are leaving [type of area]' on the reverse.

Displacement

Restrictions may unintentionally result in displacement of dog owners onto other pieces of land, resulting in new conflicts being created or existing problems being intensified elsewhere. Local authorities should consider whether alternative sites for dog walkers are suitable and can support an increase in the number of dog walkers using them.

Exemptions

When introducing a dog control PSPO, local authorities should consider the potential negative impacts on vulnerable groups and their requirements under the Equality Act 2010. The most obvious potential adverse impact is upon those who rely on assistance dogs and registered blind people, who may either be unable to comply with conditions contained within the Order or who may be excluded from accessing public spaces as a result of the

Order. Appropriate exemptions from dog fouling and dog exclusion measures should be included.

We encourage local authorities to allow for some flexibility when considering whether a disabled person's dog is acting as an assistance dog. Local authorities may wish to consider the following wording when drafting a PSPO in order to be as inclusive as possible: 'The term "assistance dog" shall mean a dog which has been trained to assist a person with a disability.

The expression "disability" shall have the meaning prescribed in Section 6 of the Equality Act 2010 or as may be defined in any subsequent amendment or re-enactment of that legislation.'

Get in contact

We are always willing to discuss potential solutions to dog-related issues faced by local authorities. We are able to provide advice on Public Spaces Protection Orders, Dog Control Orders and other dog management approaches. We strongly recommend contacting us prior to the launch of any relevant formal consultations. [Please contact us by email.](#)

More information

For more information, please read the [Home Office's guidance](#) for PSPOs, [the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs' guidance on dealing with irresponsible dog ownership](#) or the [Local Government Association's guidance for local councils](#).

Please [read our Out of Order report](#) regarding dog access to find further information from The Kennel Club.