

Proposed Dog Controls in Coventry

Responses to specific questions

This document is to be read in conjunction with the “Dog Controls in Coventry Final Report: Findings from the Public Consultation – November 2014”.

Whilst the majority of people who responded to the consultation were overwhelmingly in support of the proposals to introduce further dog controls in Coventry, there were a number of people who expressed legitimate concerns.

Whilst it is impractical to answer all of the concerns raised, this document seeks to answer some of the questions which represented ‘common themes’.

Disagree with Dogs on Lead Order

“This will impact upon responsible dog owners who have well-behaved dogs. It would be better to have the powers to fine dog owners who's dogs are causing problems off the lead rather than having a blanket ban”

“All dogs have a need to have off lead exercise. If this is not allowed you will end up with dogs that are agitated and stressed”

“There are enough controls already ...education and support would be far more positive”

Answers:

1. Currently the City Council has limited powers to address the behaviour of a minority of irresponsible dog owners; the proposed Order would empower the City Council to address these issues. It is recognised that that the majority of dog owners are conscious of their actions on others and would therefore, have no reason to fear if this Order was introduced. Indeed the consultation demonstrated that there was considerable support amongst this particular group of people. In practice, enforcement would only routinely be used where we receive specific complaints from members of the public.
2. It is recognised that the City needs specific areas where dogs can be exercised ‘off lead’ for their health and mental well-being. The vast majority of parks have such areas and it is proposed that the Order, in nearly all cases, will not materially change the position beyond the signage already present in these parks.
3. Education and support is an important ingredient of any change in legislation. If further dog controls are introduced, our Officers during a phased period of implementation, will personally through face-to-face contact, through social

media and more traditional publicity, seek to educate, persuade and sell the benefits of the controls.

Disagree with Dogs on Lead by Direction

"It could be open to abuse... I do not feel that ALL council officers would be able to use discretion when a dog is causing a nuisance or not. I feel there would be a blanket rule, borne out of one bad owner spoiling it for the many. It would be a quick unethical way to build up revenue too."

"I do agree in the theory that if a dog was causing a nuisance and not under control, the owner should be asked to put it on a lead. But I fail to see how this could be enforced by an Authorised Officer (AO). The irresponsible person, who allows their dog to cause a nuisance, is unlikely to listen to an AO, or do what the AO tells them. They are also unlikely to pay any fine or to give a correct name and address."

"Responsible dog owners know when to put their dogs on a lead."

1. Any proposed powers to request that dogs be placed on leads by Council "Authorised Officers" will be restricted to suitably trained Enforcement Officers. The Order would also clearly state that these powers could only be exercised where restraint is reasonably necessary to prevent either a nuisance, or behaviour by the dog likely to cause annoyance or disturbance to any other person, or the worrying of other animals on designated land to which this Order applies.
2. Our Enforcement Officers are trained to deal with such situations. In the last financial year these Officers issued over 600 Fixed Penalty Notices; it is the City Council's policy to prosecute these offenders where the Notices are not paid. In extreme cases, Officers are able to immediately call upon Police assistance.
3. This proposed Order is designed to deal with the minority of irresponsible dog owners. In many cases, it is responsible dog owners who suffer at the hands of irresponsible dog owners.

Disagree with Restrictions on Places Dogs can go

“As a responsible dog owner I am capable of exercising common sense, and abiding by any restriction notices. I do not need council officers to instruct me to do anything.”

“A dog under control (on a lead) should be able to accompany it's owner anywhere.”

“Is the Council going to provide dog crèche facilities when a family with a dog needs to use an area where there is a restriction order?”

“There are parts of the country that manage to be dog friendly without a problem. Many parts of the south west will allow you to take your dog in many places. For responsible dog owners, your dog(s) is part of the family. I think that so long as dogs are kept on leads in areas where there are children for example, they should be allowed access. A blanket ban is unnecessary and will only serve to ostracise responsible dog owners and well trained dogs.”

1. This Order is designed to deal with irresponsible dog owners who have no consideration for others.
2. It is recognised that some dog owners are not capable of controlling their dog off lead or on a lead. This proposed Order is designed to restrict dogs from a minority of places, which is largely for public health reasons and a matter of common sense. People who took part in the consultation overwhelmingly supported the examples given where dog access could be restricted.
3. In areas where dogs are restricted and a family, with a dog, needs to legitimately enter these areas, there will invariably be options to tether the dog safely and within sight.
4. Again it is recognised that the vast majority of dog owners are responsible and are capable of exercising sufficient control over their dog. Unfortunately there are exceptions to this rule and proposed controls are designed to deal with those situations. Places where dogs are prohibited will be limited, be for public health reasons and largely common sense.

Disagree with Restriction on the Number of Dogs

"1 or 10 dogs it doesn't matter if they are completely under control at all times. People will cause the problems not the dogs."

"Again, this punishes responsible dog owners. For example, this would affect professional dog walkers - increasing their costs and possibly putting them out of business. Only responsible dog owners use professional dog walkers and these restrictions would make the cost of a good professional dog walker more expensive."

"The majority of dog owners ARE responsible and if they are in control of their dogs, it really is no business of yours how many they are walking at a time. Will you be introducing similar restrictions on the amount of children one person can take to a restaurant or play area? I doubt it."

1. It is proposed that the maximum number of dogs that can be walked by a single person, be set at six. This is in line with guidance recently published by the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA). During the consultation period, our Officers met with various 'dog related' businesses, which included 'professional dog walking' companies. They agreed with the points raised by consultees, but also agreed with the proposed controls.
2. See the answer to question 1.
3. Again, we recognise that the vast majority of dog owners are responsible. The proposed Order is designed to enable the Local Authority to deal with those who are not. It is believed that the maximum of six dogs that can be walked by an individual is a practical limit.

Any other Comments

"Dogs should all be identifiable with ID tags (by law) so this should be enforced, and those guilty of being irresponsible penalised without blanket bans affecting everyone."

"You seem to be giving council officers powers more akin to the police. Council officers do not necessarily have the skills, training or judgement. You provide no guidelines or examples of how this would be implemented or monitored so cannot be supported. As councils get smaller you may also be creating powers that may also never be enacted, raising unnecessary expectations "

"I think the ideas and motivation for dog control orders are generally well founded but it is the practicalities of implementing them in a sensitive and sensible way in reality which I worry somewhat about. It would be useful to get advice and help from organisations such as the Dog's Trust and similar bodies and would also be very useful for any Authorised Officers if they were to be appointed to gain knowledge from them. Working together with police and

PCSO's would also be beneficial."

"I would rather pay some sort of license to say I'm a responsible owner and allowed to let my dogs off than be banned from places or made to keep my dogs on leads."

"This is claiming all owners are the same when they clearly are not. I understand you're trying to control what goes on but it's not going to work. You can't make people pick up their own dogs mess so how do you think you're going to control this."

"I think the Council should be concentrating on dealing with people who can't control their dogs and make them have them on a lead. The Council also need to look at these dog walking companies that keep cropping up. Some of them have a great big group of dogs that just go wild."

1. Currently there are no powers available to compel the owners of dogs to attach ID tags to collars.
2. Our Enforcement Officers have been utilising similar powers to those proposed in the Order for nearly 20 years; all of these Officers are suitably trained. It is fact that the Council's resources are limited and therefore any use of the proposed powers will be focused on where they are needed most. The intelligence as to where they are needed will be received from members of the public and in all likelihood, other dog owners.
3. In drafting the proposed Orders we called upon expertise elsewhere in the country and also in consultation with the Police.
4. The Council has no powers to introduce dog licensing. Legislation previously used to licence dogs was repealed.
5. If the proposed Order is enacted, Local Authority Officers will use these powers. In the last financial year our Officers issued 360 fixed penalty notices for dog fouling offences.
6. If the proposed Order is granted the appropriate powers will be used to deal with irresponsible dog owners.

