

REPORT TO: East Lothian Council

MEETING DATE: 24 February 2015

BY: Depute Chief Executive (Partnerships and Community Services)

SUBJECT: Charging Policy: Charges for Dog Waste Bags

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 That Council considers introducing a charge to members of the public for the provision of dog waste bags.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 It is recommended that Council approves the introduction of a charge of £1 (including VAT) per 50 dog waste bags (a pack), commencing 1 April 2015. Part of the income derived will be used to cover the costs of bags, ordering, delivering and distribution. The remainder of the income will be used to help fund initiatives related to responsible dog ownership. The charge will be reviewed on an annual basis.

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Council has been supplying dog waste bags free of charge since 1993. 1,200,000 and 1,800,000 bags were issued during 2012/2013 and 2013/2014 respectively. A pack of 50 bags currently costs the council £0.19. An estimate suggests that this service extends to less than 2000 dog owners.

- 3.2 The Council has made the following expenditure on dog waste bags over the past five years:

	£
2010/11	14,160
2011/12	10,915
2012/13	7,776

2013/14 11,880

2014/15 6,098
(to date)

In addition to this outlay, staff time is expended on ordering and distributing the bags to area offices, libraries etc.

Expenditure on dog waste bags was reduced in 2012/13 by introducing a limit of 1 pack of dog waste bags per customer. However, this has caused problems with customers being very unhappy that staff would not give out more than one pack at a time.

- 3.3 During the Service Review – Face to Face Services in 2013, workshops were held for staff. When looking at income generation ideas, charging for dog waste bags was a top priority for staff. This was due to the fact that the provision of dog waste bags could not keep up with demand and that a number of customers identified they were using the bags for other purposes, most notably for the disposal of nappies. Introducing a charge for dog waste bags was a recommendation from this Service Review.
- 3.4 The number of dog fouling complaints made to the Council remains high. 457 complaints were received during 2013/2014. 287 complaints have been received since 1 April 2014.
- 3.5 The 2014 East Lothian Citizens' Panel summer survey revealed that 60% of respondents said that dog fouling was either a very common or fairly common problem in their neighbourhood. There is now a lower tolerance of this problem by members of the public.
- 3.6 In the 2014 East Lothian Citizens' Panel winter survey, members were asked for their views on the provision of dog waste bags (see Appendix 1)

Of the 659 who answered this question, 89 (14%) felt the Council should no longer provide dog waste bags, 158 (24%) felt that the Council should continue to provide dog waste bags free of charge, and 408 (62%) of respondents supported the idea of the Council continuing to provide dog waste bags, but with a nominal charge being applied to cover costs and to help fund initiatives related to responsible dog ownership.
- 3.7 The Cabinet approved a Charging Policy at its meeting of 13 January 2015. Introducing a charge is in line with the said policy in so much as it removes the scenario of council tax payers subsidising a service enjoyed by the relatively small percentage of dog owners.
- 3.8 The Council has undertaken a benchmarking exercise to identify whether other councils apply charges for the provision of dog waste bags. Of the 31 Councils, 12 Councils do not provide dog waste bags, 16 provide dog waste bags free of charge and 3 Councils provide dog waste bags and apply charges (see Appendix 2).

- 3.9 Applying a charge of £1 per pack of 50 bags could potentially generate income of approximately £13,000 per annum (after the deduction of outlays), using a projection of 800,000 bags being issued during 2015/2016. The suggested price is less expensive than that currently charged by commercial outlets.
- 3.10 The report to the Policy and Performance Review Committee in June 2014 on the Dog Fouling Enforcement Update identified that results from the Keep Scotland Beautiful – Local Environment Audit Management System shows the number of sampled transects of pavement in the County with a presence of dog fouling falling from a high of 26% in 2013 to a current average of 7%. So the dog fouling situation is improving and we wish to continue this downward trend.
- 3.11 There will continue to be campaigns related to dog fouling and the Dogwatch initiative and there is due to be a Citizen-led inspection related to a cleaner environment which will include issues related to dog fouling. Any additional income will assist with continuing campaigns and other initiatives.

4 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Expenditure on dog waste bags and their distribution will be met by the income taken in from a charge for the dog waste bags to dog owners or individuals who walk dogs, if a charge was to be introduced.

5 EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 5.1 An equalities impact assessment is not applicable as this proposal is aimed at the general population and this is an additional service provided by the Council.

6 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Financial – Once the costs of the dog waste bags, distribution etc is taken away there should be income of approximately £13,000 in income per annum.
- 6.2 Personnel - None.
- 6.3 Other – None.

7 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 7.1 Policy and Performance Review Committee Report – Dog Fouling Enforcement Update – 17 June 2014

- 7.2 East Lothian Council's Charging Policy 2015
- 7.3 Appendix 1: East Lothian Citizens Panel Winter Survey – ASB extract - Dogs
- 7.4 Appendix 2: List of other Scottish councils provision of dog waste bags

AUTHOR'S NAME	Tom Shearer
DESIGNATION	Head of Communities and Partnerships
CONTACT INFO	01620 827 413
DATE	9 February 2015

Antisocial Behaviour

Provision of dog waste bags

Appendix 1

The following information was provided at the start of the section of questions relating to responsible dog ownership:

Dog fouling is an issue which members of the public routinely complain about. 60% of people responding to the last Citizens' Panel questionnaire said that dog fouling of footpaths was fairly common or very common in their neighbourhood.

East Lothian Council has spent around £38,000 over the past 4 years providing dog bags free of charge in order to encourage dog owners to clear up after their dogs. However, we are now reviewing this policy and would like to know your views.

Respondents were then asked for views on the provision of dog waste bags. Just under a quarter of respondents (24%) suggested that the council should continue with the status quo, providing dog waste bags free of charge. The majority, however, felt that the Council should continue to provide bags, but should charge for them. Only 14% thought the Council should stop providing bags altogether.

Which of the following options do you support? (please tick just one)	659	659
The council should continue to provide dog waste bags free of charge	24%	158
The council should stop providing dog waste bags altogether	14%	89
The council should continue to provide dog bags but should charge a nominal amount to cover the cost of this and to help fund other initiatives related to responsible dog owners	62%	408

Microchipping for dogs

Information was also provided in relation to proposals to introduce free microchipping for dogs:

In the past 3 years, East Lothian Council has collected 154 stray dogs – around 40% of them were rehomed and 60% were returned to their owners and a fine of £25 charged. To help deal with this issue we are considering introducing a free microchipping service in conjunction with a local vet – this service would be paid for through the income from fines related to stray dogs. Any stray dog found without a chip would be microchipped.

Based on this information, the majority of respondents (70%) felt that the introduction of a free microchipping service was a good idea.

Do you think the Council provided a free microchipping service is a good idea?	654	654
Yes	70%	456
No	30%	193

Provision of Dog Waste Bags

Appendix 2

Council	Provide	Charge	Specific fee
Aberdeen City	Yes	Yes	£3 per pack
Aberdeenshire	Yes	No	
Angus	Yes	Yes	20p for 25 bags
Argyll and Bute	Yes	Yes	£1 for 50 bags
Clackmannanshire	Yes	No	
Dumfries and Galloway	Yes	No	
Dundee City	Yes	No	
East Ayrshire	Yes	No	
East Dunbartonshire	Yes	No	
East Renfrewshire	No	No	
City of Edinburgh	No	No	
Eilean Siar	No	No	
Falkirk	Yes	No	
Fife	No	No	
City of Glasgow	No	No	
Highland	Yes	No	
Inverclyde	No	No	
Midlothian Council	Yes	No	
Moray	Yes	No	
North Ayrshire	Yes	No	
North Lanarkshire	Yes	No	
Orkney Islands	No	No	
Perth and Kinross	Yes	No	
Renfrewshire	No	No	
Scottish Borders	No	No	
Shetland Islands	No	No	
South Ayrshire	No	No	
South Lanarkshire	Yes	No	
Stirling	Yes	No	
West Dunbartonshire	Yes	No	
West Lothian	No	No	