

P-06-1527 Review dog walking restrictions on Welsh beaches and issue guidance to relevant bodies - Petitioner to the Committee, 03 June 2025

Petitions Committee – further evidence

I would like to thank the Committee and the Minister for their interest in this matter.

Introduction and context

It is an important subject considering around 31% of UK households own at least one dog and that there are around 12 million dogs kept as pets in the UK. The proportions are higher in rural areas such as Wales.

Dogs need exercising and beaches are an ideal place to do so, however their presence needs to be balanced against the public use of beaches for other purposes.

Pet dog ownership brings with it a range of other wider social benefits beyond just direct and indirect economic benefits which are themselves very substantial:

- In mental health and wellbeing, thus reducing burden on the NHS
- In getting people out and exercising
- It Increases social connection
- In developing environmental awareness
- In the development of children
- As working dogs e.g. in public safety

Dog ownership in the UK is more than a lifestyle choice—it is a public good with widespread benefits for individuals, communities, and the economy. By recognising the value that dogs bring to society, the Welsh government can strengthen communities, reduce healthcare costs, and enhance overall wellbeing.

A quick look at the number of Airbnbs that make a point of offering dog friendly accommodation shows how many people visit Wales for instance, and might not do so if dogs were not tolerated, creating economic loss especially out of season. And dog owners make a contribution to the economy even down to the last pound they put into the car parking ticket machine.

Therefore, dog ownership touches upon a number of areas of central and local government administration, including: economic, mental health, physical health, public health and water quality, social wellbeing, tourism, environment, safety and litter.

The Climate Change and Rural Affairs Ministerial portfolio is a broad one. Notwithstanding, matters associated with dog ownership relate to a number of Ministerial portfolios in Welsh Government. So, therefore, should dog related policies.

Governance

1. Management of dogs on beaches is one of many functions delegated to local Government local authorities (LA). Historically it used to do so through the provision of byelaws which were signed off by Ministers. The legislative byelaw powers were often antiquated and therefore used as interpreted powers rather than absolute ones.

In more recent times powers have been delegated further to LAs and a new set of powers used – that of the expedited Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) process which relates to anti-social behaviour generally. But even this piece of legislation is not designed specifically to cover dogs or dogs on beaches; it is one that may be usefully adapted and used for that purpose. Importantly, such orders are implemented directly by LAs thereby by-passing the previous Ministerial overview associated with the old byelaw method. What this does in practice, is remove a level of standardisation that implicitly was a part of the old mechanism in favour of individual decisions by LAs in Wales.

Notable point: A coherent policy of dogs on beaches now relies upon those individual LAs who do have a coast in producing one. This does not happen and I suggest there is a potential role in Welsh Government to aid this process.

2. All legislation must follow the principle of PROPORTIONALITY as a matter of sound law. What this means in practice is that because legislation is restrictive and constrains otherwise legitimate public activity, it must be “no more than is strictly necessary to deliver the intended objectives”. This is an extremely important principle and one that LAs must themselves adhere to when implementing their PSPO orders.

Notable point: If LAs are acting individually and self-implementing their own PSPO related dog control Orders (unlike historically under byelaws) where is the guidance to aid that they are acting in a proportionate manner AND in relation to the laid down objectives?

3. In practice, options to control dogs on beaches include the following limitations either individually or in combination:
 - Area eg north – south boundary usually shown on a map.
 - Times eg restrictions not applying overnight say 6pm to 10am
 - Season eg May to September prohibition
 - Specific reasonable control measures such as dogs being on a lead or in picking up littering.

4. The Minister’s response says that “*there are no plans to issue further guidance*”. That is the subject and intention of my petition.

I am not aware that any such guidance exists. There is guidance on the general principles of issuing old byelaws and more recent guidance in relation to the newer PSPO powers. Any mention of dogs on beaches is tangential.

If the Minister can provide this guidance, then, depending on its content, the whole basis of this petition falls away. It would then be a matter of seeing if the guidance was being followed or if it needs amending in the light of observation.

Notable point: What Welsh guidance does in fact exist as to what controls of dogs on Welsh beaches would be reasonable, proportionate and consistent?

Admittedly I am assuming that some level of consistency would be useful in Wales and that there is no random hotch-potch of controls as this would make

understanding and implementing dog control measures very difficult, nor might such controls be consistent with addressing presumably common issues?

An active practical example

5. City and County of Swansea (CCS) are currently reviewing their dog control measures on Swansea Bay which is an urban beach under no blue flag or Green coast designation.
6. The review is a positive action as the controls in place are old (referring to 1907 Public Health Act legislation and the resultant byelaws as old as and as last revised in 1991). Beach activities have changed since then and a change to the areas of dog activity are very much supported by both dog and non-dog people.
7. The Council's original plans can be found at [\(Item 16 papers pack\)](#). However, the item has been temporarily withdrawn for decision for redrafting following representations on legal and procedural issues.
8. Whilst solid support exists to modify the dog ban areas for Swansea Bay, the CCS is not minded to look any further than this such as to make a change to the core season or to introduce times for access. This despite a large majority of their informal questionnaire's 4188 respondents supporting this (72% on season and 66% on times respectively- [see pg 200 CCS report](#)). Perhaps CCS would benefit from some guidance?
9. This is their prerogative. But they are seemingly doing the review individually in the absence of guidance which risks producing an inconsistent approach throughout Wales with different measures taking place in different places at different times and for different reasons (assuming justification reasons are stated at all). In the defence of CCS and as far as season is concerned, no doubt they would say that they *are* being consistent in following a 1 May Wales default. Below I question the basis of that date in defining the closed season period.
10. So far, so good if the reasons for their decisions are given for each option (assuming they are called to account at all as part of the PSPO Order introduction process) and their actions are reasonable and proportionate.
11. However, there must be some doubt since the current petition received a high percentage and very rapid response from the Swansea Bay and Gower region which indicates a high degree of discontent. Swansea Bay is a plain urban beach. It generally has no facilities and often has poor water quality so it has neither a Blue Flag nor Green coast award. Clearly a lot of dog owners are unhappy. Would some guidance be useful with respect to non-Blue Flag and non-Green coast award beaches?

Notable point. When a LA implements a PSPO order what level of independent scrutiny takes place such that an order meets the reasonableness and proportionality tests required of good legislation? Or that the actions are

appropriate for non-designated urban beaches compared to others with a Green coast or Blue flag classification? Or should the highest level of dog controls apply equally to all beaches, thus depriving dog walkers of access to beaches not being heavily used recreationally by the public? Is there is a risk of PSPO powers being misused?

12. In the remainder of this submission, I wish to largely refer to the matter of **Seasonal controls**.

Whether the bespoke seasonal ban of dogs on Welsh beaches should be as long as from 1 May – 30 September

13. The question asked is: Why are dogs banned from Wales on 1 May each year which is a longer prohibition than other UK countries and counties which work to 15 May or later?
14. Taken from the petition – *“In Scotland and Northern Ireland dogs are banned from beaches from **1 June – 15 Sept** (incl). In England, such as Cornwall, dog bans cover the shorter period **15 May – 30th September** for Blue Flag beaches and the school holiday period of **1 July – 31st August** for other beaches, but **additionally allow out of hours dog access between 6pm and 10am**. In not so sunny, rain and windswept Wales the banned period is **1 May – 30th September** or even longer (with NO out of hours' time exceptions) and this applies for some general beaches, for Green coast awards and for Blue Flag beaches. This is even 2 weeks before the commencement of the official bathing season on 15 May under England and Wales Bathing Water Regulations 2013.*

There is NO presumption that Blue Flags should cover the entirety of a beach or that their season should be fixed 15 May – 30 September (or even from 1 May!) or to exclude out of hours access. Keep Wales Tidy (who classify Blue Flag beaches in Wales) say that it is up to the applicant body to decide how long the Blue Flag season will be within the timeframe of the Bathing Water season and other considerations.”

15. In its [item 16 pg 201 CCS report](#) erroneously said *“It is important to note that a seasonal dog ban between 1st May and 30th September is a fundamental requirement for Blue Flag status. Therefore, all the other Gower beaches should retain the existing byelaw controls.”* As this conflicts with Keep Wales Tidy view, perhaps the council would benefit from some guidance?
16. **If** the May commencement date is tied to historical EU bathing waters legislation, then should the start date be the 15th May and not the Welsh 1 May? In considering the proportionality test required as part of good legal practices does the 1 May period meet that test i.e. does the end justify the means, that the extent of control of dogs on beaches is no more than is reasonably required to meet legislative needs and the objectives being met?
- Again, perhaps the matter would be furthered by the issuing of guidance to Local Authorities in Wales?

17. Dog walkers are fed up of being restricted from walking on Welsh beaches during large parts of the 1 May – 30th September period seemingly “as rote”. When for a large part the dog walkers might be the only persons on the beach had they been allowed! Temptation is high, risking enforcement action. Action that LAs are ill placed to enforce. Feelings risk running high. If dog owners are discontented, to whom do they turn – especially if the LA has no guidance and does not listen and the owner has no idea why they are banned on that date?
18. If controls of dogs on beaches are no more restrictive than is reasonably required to deliver the objectives –then would a revised closure period of **1 July to the end of August** main school holiday period be a more suitable baseline than 1 May (or even 15 May) to 30th September- possibly with an additional **6pm to 10 am inclusion** as in many areas in Cornwall? Concise Welsh Government guidance might then be used to guide LAs to making more restrictive practice when appropriate eg for Blue Flag and Green coast award areas. One size does not fit all. A May 1 exclusion start date seems to be an unexplained anachronism.

Conclusion

19. Much of the above submission provides context.

My ask via the petition is: Whether the Senedd consider that Welsh Government should issue guidance to Local Authorities in the management of dogs on Welsh beaches, given the importance of the subject and the benefit of a consistent approach?

More specifically, whether the current total blanket exclusion of dogs on many Welsh beaches in the period 1 May to 30 September (and without further daily relaxation times) and which is more restrictive than any other part of UK (save some Blue Flag beaches) is proportionate to the objectives? And is it a subject on which LAs would benefit from Welsh Government guidance?

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