

Report on	Clean Neighbourhood Action Plan
Date of Meeting	6th April 2022
Reporting Officer	Kieran Gordon, Assistant Director Health, Leisure & Wellbeing
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Is this report restricted for confidential business? If 'Yes', confirm below the exempt information category relied upon	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
	No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report
1.1	This report is to provide an update on the Council's Clean Neighbourhood Action Plan and to seek approval for Council to participate in the ' <i>Walk This Way Initiative</i> ' in partnership with the Dogs Trust and Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful (KNIB).
1.2	Previously in May 2021, Members at the Environment Committee resolved to approve the Clean Neighbourhood Action Plan (minute reference E145/21). A copy is enclosed within Appendix A. In summary, the action plan includes a number of options for addressing the problems of littering and dog fouling across the Mid Ulster District with an enhanced focus on robust enforcement action. The plan has also been incorporated into the Corporate Improvement Plan (CIP 3) – to create cleaner neighbourhoods where everyone takes responsibility for their waste and the environment. Further details on the action plan is included within appendix A.
2.0	Background
2.1	Previously at a workshop held during January 2021, Members expressed the view that a 'Zero Tolerance' approach should be adopted towards unacceptable behaviours associated with littering and dog fouling and that enhanced enforcement action should be taken in relation to offences which are reported to or observed by Council Officers. This led on to the development of a draft Clean Neighbourhood Action Plan which was considered by Members at the Environment Committee in April 2021 (minute reference: E116/21) and following further engagement and amendment, the action plan was approved by Members at the Environment Committee in May 2021 (minute reference: E145/21).
2.2	As part of this decision, Members approved to pilot the use of a private contractor for enforcement for up to 12 months and subsequently a comprehensive overview was provided for Members consideration from the firm WISE (Waste Investigations, Support & Enforcement) Ltd. Thereafter, in October 2021, Members at the Environment Committee resolved to approve the terms of engagement and the associated Service Level Agreement for the 12 month pilot for WISE to be engaged for additional support in the area of addressing dog fouling and littering within the Mid Ulster District Council area.
2.3	This service requires the private contractors to be authorised by Mid Ulster District Council to provide a monitoring service across the district, issue Fixed Penalty Notices (FPN's) where necessary (£80 for a litter offence and £50 for a dog fouling offence) and where

	<p>needed, forward information to Council in the event of non-payment of fixed penalty notices for further legal action. This pilot engagement permits the private contractor to work with no cost to Council. Furthermore, in November 2021, Members resolved that a reduced payment option for fines is not permitted during the 12 month pilot (minute reference: E275/21).</p>
2.4	<p>The approved Service Level Agreement ensures that WISE will patrol the whole Council area which includes the rural areas and rural roads. They have estimated that this would be between 10-15% of the overall patrol hours - any additional patrols and time spent on rural areas/roads can be facilitated and will be dependent on submitted intelligence and complaints from Members and the public.</p>
2.5	<p>To add further value to the Council's Clean Neighbourhood Action Plan, Mid Ulster Council have an opportunity to participate in the '<i>Walk This Way Initiative</i>' in partnership with the Dogs Trust and Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful (KNIB). The campaign will focus specifically on the issue of dog fouling, encouraging dog owners to carry waste disposal bags with them and highlight the location of nearby bins where dog foul can be suitably disposed of.</p>
3.0	Main Report
3.0	<p><u>Targeted Enforcement Pilot Update</u> A team of Council authorised WISE officers commenced operations within the District on 18th January 2022 and Mid Ulster District Council became the 4th Council in Northern Ireland to engage WISE for a 12 month pilot. The team of authorised WISE officers working within the District are now largely settled and all come from a process of local recruitment. The team of 5 litter enforcement officers undertake patrols, working in shifts and provide a 7 day a week operation including mornings and evenings.</p>
3.1	<p>Through the pilot, WISE officers are focussed on providing a visible deterrent and the detection of offences, which also incorporates intelligence and complaint led patrolling across the District. In addition to targeted visits from WISE staff, the areas continue to be monitored by Mid Ulster District Council Enforcement Officers in addition to their other duties.</p>
3.2	<p>From the commencement of the pilot on 18th January 2022 to the 22nd March 2022 (9 weeks), there have been 651 FPN's served. Of the 651 FPN's issued, 62% have been paid to date. As part of Councils robust approach to littering offences, should the offender not respond to the 2 reminders issued by the WISE data system, case files on these offenders will be prepared by Council for legal proceedings through the Magistrate's Court for the original littering offence.</p>
3.3	<p>As this pilot has only been operating for 9 weeks, the first tranche of these cases are being prepared and officers from the Environmental Health service will work with the Councils Legal team to support this significant aspect of enforcement arising from the pilot. It is anticipated that the income proportion to Council from the issue FPN's by WISE can meet the cost of the administration of legal proceedings. Further details on the pilot to date is included within Appendix B.</p>
3.4	<p>As well as general patrols, the team will also engage in 'intelligence-led' work, targeting areas of complaint or those identified as litter hotspots. Within the first 9 weeks of operations, there have been 24 hotspots reported with requests for targeted patrolling to be undertaken. Patrols have taken place at 21 of these hotspots to date with educational talks given to people encountered on route. The remaining hotspots are scheduled for visit.</p>

3.5	<p>All those that have been issued a FPN have the right of representation directly to the company to challenge the issue. Details are provided on the FPN and on the Councils website: https://www.midulstercouncil.org/litterenforcement</p>
3.6	<p>For those who do not have internet access, an address for written representations can be provided.</p>
3.7	<p>Should members of the public be dis-satisfied with any element of the service, their first line complaint will be via WISE customer service agents with information being reported back to Council where relevant. Within the first 9 weeks of operations, there has been total of 26 representations made to WISE by citizens regarding the service of FPN's which represents a total of 4% of the total of 651 FPN's served to date. These were mostly relating to a request for extra time to pay an FPN that they had been issued, or saying that they didn't understand the specifics of the offence committed. Of this total of 26 representations, 18 were not upheld and 6 have been accepted with the FPN's duly rescinded. The remaining 2 are being processed at present. Should members of the public still be dis-satisfied with the outcome of their complaint via WISE, the matter is referred back to Council to implement the process as per stage 2 of the Council's complaint policy. To date, no stage 2 processes have had to be instigated by Council.</p>
3.8	<p>A range of communication messages and a variety of media will be used to continue to advise the public of the pilot and that littering is an offence.</p>
3.9	<p>Whilst operating on behalf of the Council visibly patrolling the District, the officers from WISE have been able to offer support to members of the public in various situations alongside their enforcement duties.</p>
3.10	<p>Members are reminded that should they wish to accompany any of the officers on patrol to observe first-hand how they engage with the public, that may be arranged.</p>
3.11	<p>Council officers will continue to work with WISE officers targeting litter hotspots and promoting anti-litter initiatives.</p>
	<p><u>Walk This Way Initiative</u></p>
3.13	<p>To add further value to the Council's Clean Neighbourhood Action Plan, Mid Ulster Council have an opportunity to participate in the 'Walk This Way Initiative' in partnership with the Dogs Trust and Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful (KNIB). The campaign will focus specifically on the issue of dog fouling, encouraging dog owners to carry waste disposal bags with them and highlight the location of nearby bins where dog foul can be suitably disposed of. Further details on the pilot is included within Appendix C.</p>
3.14	<p>"Walk this Way" involves creating a dog-friendly walking route in a park, nature reserve, coastal, or woodland area. The route will facilitate more opportunities for owners to suitably dispose of dog waste by improving the sites bin-infrastructure and prominence.</p>
3.15	<p>The dog-walking route is plotted, and highlighted on welcome maps at entrances. Prominent signage and colourful route markers are fixed at regular intervals along the route. Bin stickers are placed on all bins on the route to remind owners that any litterbin can accept dog waste.</p>
3.16	<p>Route markers are positioned every 200 metres to ensure walkers are on the correct path. It is ensured that bins are available at every kilometre along the route, allowing ample opportunity for correct disposal.</p>

<p>3.17</p> <p>3.18</p> <p>3.19</p> <p>3.20</p>	<p>The partners have asked Council to nominate one site for this study and the proposal is to nominate the Lough Fea walk near Cookstown. This is centrally located and is a popular dog walking spot. It is also one of the more significant dog fouling hotspots in the District. Should this prove to be successful in reducing levels of dog fouling in this area similar initiatives may be undertaken in other hotspot areas throughout the District.</p> <p>The initiative involves a 4-week baseline study of the amount of fouling along the route. It is proposed to commence this scheme in May and similar follow up studies will be carried out once the signage is in place in both June and October. The route is proposed to be cleansed three times per week and a final report will be received from the Dogs Trust on completion.</p> <p>In areas where this initiative has previously taken place, “Walk this Way” have reported that not only have they evidenced reduced dog-fouling, but also increased the perceived value of the area. In fact, through recent study’s, 63% of site users agreed that the site had become a more enjoyable place to be, and 60% became more aware how the local authority / site owner was trying to make improvements to the area.</p> <p>An update will be brought for members attention on completion of the study.</p>
<p>4.0</p>	<p>Other Considerations</p>
<p>4.1</p>	<p>Financial, Human Resources & Risk Implications</p> <p>Financial: WISE will retain 90% of the income generated and pay Mid Ulster District Council 10% of all income generated at the end of months 3, 6, 9 and 12. There may be additional legal costs incurred for prosecutions in the event of non-payment of fixed penalty notices however, it is anticipated that the income proportion to Council from the issue FPN’s by WISE can meet the cost of the administration of legal proceedings.</p> <p>The cost of the “Walk this Way” initiative is £300.</p> <p>Human: Staff liaison time with the external enforcement contractor.</p> <p>Staff time for the “Walk this Way” initiative – planning, erecting the signage/route markers and bin stickers. The site is currently cleaned three times per week so there will be no additional staff resource although there will be additional time to monitor fouling for the duration of the study.</p> <p>Risk Management: Considered in line with relevant policies and procedures.</p>
<p>4.2</p>	<p>Screening & Impact Assessments</p> <p>Equality & Good Relations Implications: None anticipated at this juncture.</p> <p>Rural Needs Implications: None anticipated at this juncture.</p>

5.0	Recommendation(s)
5.1	<p>To note the contents of this update report on the Clean Neighbourhood Action Plan and give approval for Council:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participate in the 'Walk This Way Initiative' in partnership with the Dogs Trust and Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful (KNIB) at an initial cost of £300.
6.0	Documents Attached & References
6.1	<p>Appendix A – Clean Neighbourhood Action Plan Appendix B – Targeted Enforcement Pilot Update 18th Jan 2022 – 22nd March 2022 Appendix C - Details of Walk This Way Initiative</p>