

Committee(s): Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood and Queen's Park Committee	Date(s): 15 June 2022
Subject: Review of Commercial Licensing Scheme (Professional Dog Walkers)	Public
Which outcomes in the City Corporation's Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?	1, 2, 3, 4, 5 & 12
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	N
If so, how much?	
What is the source of Funding?	
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?	
Report of: Executive Director, Environment	For Decision
Report author: Stefania Horne, Executive Director	

Summary

This report provides Members with an update on the Commercial Licensing Scheme for Professional Dog Walkers at Hampstead Heath.

The licencing scheme was introduced on the 1 April 2022. On 29 September 2021 It was agreed by this committee that 70 full time licences be available to walk dogs commercially. The objective for the introduction of scheme was to regulate the activity of commercial dog walking with an opportunity to reduce the impact on the natural environment and wildlife. The scheme would deter some use due to the nature of the charges, will enable more dog control as it would reduce the number of permitted dogs to 4 under one person control and will give important data on how the Heath is used by commercial dog walkers so that proactive management can take place.

The cap of 70 licences proved not to be a useful approach when the number of non-commercial dog walkers also influences the use of the Heath. A new approach should be considered with a baseline of commercial dog walkers from 2022 applications and a review of sensitive areas and its usage. This information will inform future proactive management. It is therefore proposed to initiate a wider review on how the scheme can be implemented alongside non-commercial dogs walked for a holistic management approach.

It is important to note that this approach is in in line with the Hampstead Heath Management Strategy 2018 - 2028 with a view that the balance is maintained between visitor activities and the conservation of natural and heritage values. Usage of the Heath by dog walkers is an important aspect of how the Heath is enjoyed by many and this review will consider this balanced approach.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

- Authorise the Assistant director and relevant officers to review the commercial dog licencing scheme considering the number of applications received in 2022 as a baseline and to consider a holistic approach that considers the use of the Heath and its sensitive areas.

Main Report

Background

1. In the past, large of numbers of dogs under the control of 1 person were allowed to walk on the Heath, generating complaints and with concerns about dog control being received. The licencing scheme was introduced to regulate the use of the Heath by commercial dog walkers and limited the number of dogs allowed to walk to 4 dogs under one persons control.
2. The City of London Corporation (Open Spaces) Act 2018 enables the City Corporation to operate a scheme (a “licensing scheme”) to control an activity in an open space that is carried out for commercial gain. Where an activity is specified in a licensing scheme (a “specified activity”), the City Corporation may grant a licence for the carrying on of that activity.
3. A Dog Walking Code of Conduct was agreed by this committee on 25 November 2020. This committee also agreed that a scheme for the licensing of commercial dog walkers could be introduced. Further consideration was given by this committee at their meeting on the 26 May 2021. Members agreed to retain a four dog limit for Professional Dog Walkers and to support the implementation of the Licencing Scheme.

Current Position

4. On the 1 April 2022, the licensing scheme was introduced. 21 days prior to the launch of the scheme, the City Corporation published details of the scheme on a Hampstead Heath webpage. Posters and social media messaging was also used to publish details of the scheme. Commercial dog walkers were encouraged to apply and notify the City Corporation on the zone they intended to walk on the Heath. A zone map is attached in appendix 1.
5. Since its introduction, the scheme is proving successful, with an increased knowledge and a better understanding of how the Heath is used by commercial dog walkers. The scheme presented an opportunity to engage more closely with individual businesses, with a reduced number of dogs under one person’s control. Anecdotally there has been a decrease in usage by commercial dog walkers as there has been a deterrent by the introduction of the new charges and there is now a detailed knowledge on how the various zones of the Heath are used. This will

allow a more proactive management with a positive relationship with professional dog walkers.

6. In previous reports there was a recommendation to focus on the number of commercial dog walking licences to be capped in order to mitigate the impact of this activity on the Heath. However, there is evidence that the pandemic has seen a dramatic increase in the number of privately owned dogs. It has not been straightforward to gather data on how this is impacting on the Heath. From a national dog survey, there are now over 12.5m of dogs in the UK and 23% of these belong to the generation known as “pandemic pups”. If the aim is to mitigate the impact on wildlife on the Heath by dog walking a more holistic approach is needed and a review needs to focus on how we manage sensitive areas rather than just considering number of commercial dog walkers.
7. To date, Officers have received applications equating to 90 licenses for the scheme.
8. The application window has now been closed with no further applications being received at the present time. This will enable officers to process current applications, and this will be considered the baseline for future applications.

Proposals

9. Officers are proposing to review how the dog licencing scheme can be integrated in a far more holistic approach in managing dog walking on the Heath, considering the number of applications received in 2022 as a baseline for an insight of commercial dog walking and a monitoring regime and identification of sensitive areas to mitigate wider impacts from dog walking.
10. This approach is in line with the Hampstead Heath Management Strategy 2018 – 2028 with the view that a balance is maintained between visitor activities and the conservation of natural and heritage values.
11. The Strategy also highlights the importance for the Heath to remain inclusive and welcoming to a diverse range of visitors, including dog walkers and this holistic approach will create an opportunity to improve relationships with the dog walking communities and increase sense of collective ownership.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

12. The introduction of the Code of Conduct for all Dog Walkers and a Licencing Scheme for Professional Dog Walkers contributes to the three aims set out in the City of London Corporation Corporate Plan 2018-23: Contribute to a flourishing society, Support a thriving economy and Shape outstanding environments, in particular the following Corporate Plan outcomes:
 - (1) People are safe and feel safe.
 - (5) Businesses are trusted and socially and environmentally responsible.
 - (10) We inspire enterprise, excellence, creativity and collaboration.

- (11) We have clean air, land and water and a thriving and sustainable natural environment.
- (12) Our spaces are secure, resilient and well maintained.

13. The projects and works outlined in this report contribute towards the achievement of the Hampstead Heath Management Strategy 2018-2028 Strategic Outcomes A: The Heath is maintained as a flourishing green space and historic landscape, B: Improved quality of life for Heath visitors, C: The Heath is inclusive and welcoming to a diverse range of visitors and D: Greater number of and diversity of People taking care of the Heath.

Financial Implications

14. This scheme is managed through the Hampstead Heath Local Risk Budget.

Resource Implications

15. The proposal will be implemented with current staff resources.

Climate Implications

16. Included within the Divisional Plan 2022-25 is series of projects which contribute towards achieving the City of London's Climate Action Strategy, which was launched in October 2020. A key part of the strategy is conserving and enhancing biodiversity alongside reducing carbon emissions.

Legal Implications

17. The proposed review will continue to use the existing legal framework for commercial dog licences which includes the current terms and conditions and a code of conduct.

Risk Implications

18. Risks are monitored and recorded through the Hampstead Heath Charity Risk Register.

Equality Implications

19. No impact.

Security Implications

20. Security implications are monitored and recorded through the Hampstead Heath Charity Risk Register.

Conclusion

21. Since its introduction, the professional dog walking licencing scheme has already proven useful and has allowed Officers to gain a far more detailed knowledge of

how professional dog walkers use the Heath. Focusing solely on capping numbers of professional dog walkers is a limited way to manage the usage of the Heath by dog walkers and a holistic approach monitoring sensitive areas for wildlife and engaging more effectively with the dog walkers communities will increase the sense of ownership and mitigate future impact more effectively.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Zoned Map

Background Papers

Code of Conduct for Dog Walking and Licencing Scheme for Professional Dog Walkers – Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood & Queen’s Park Committee, 25 November 2020.

Superintendent’s Update – Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood & Queen’s Park Committee, 26 May 2021, and 29 September 2021.

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