

A responsible approach: Southwark dog strategy 2011 - 2014

Southwark Council, the police and partners in the community are working hard to keep you safe.

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1. Introduction

1.1 National and regional context

Dogs have been considered man's best friend for thousands of years. The vast majority are sociable, playful, and convey tremendous pleasure to the owner and household. Walking a dog has obvious health benefits, and often facilitates social interaction with the community, whilst recent research has confirmed that owners have lower blood pressure, lower cholesterol, and fewer medical problems. For some people, particularly those who are older and alone "the social support offered by an animal is greater than the support another human could offer".¹

Unfortunately there is another side to dog ownership; in recent years the UK has witnessed a rise in dog related problems and community concerns. The blame for this does not rest with dogs per se, but often with careless, antisocial or irresponsible management and treatment. In the last five years London hospitals have seen admissions for dog bites increase by 79 percent, and some attacks have led to fatalities, often of children². Between 2004 to 2008 dog fights have increased twelve fold³. This activity, dangerous and distressing in itself, also impacts on our communities and the environment around us, through the damage to trees, swings and park benches caused by owners coercively training their dogs to be savage and to fight.

Metropolitan Police seizures of dangerous dogs have witnessed a 24 fold increase in six years, from 43 in 2003 to over 1000 in 2009 but it has been at a cost. In 2010 the Metropolitan Police allocated £10.5 million for kennelling fees alone.⁴

Tackling the problem of dangerous and out of control dogs is currently one of the Greater London Authority's (GLA) priorities. Kit Malthouse, deputy mayor has launched a petition calling on the government to take action to deal with the problem of dangerous dogs and is proposing:

- An increase in the penalty for owning a banned breed, to bring it more inline with carrying an offensive weapon
- The extension of the law to include private land, particularly to protect people who have to visit other peoples homes as part of the work
- Changes to the part of the law that allows well behaved banned breeds to remain with their owners, so that the process is much quicker, making it better for the dog and saving the police money

The GLA has hosted a number of events at City Hall in order for key agencies to discuss the issues of dangerous dogs and dogs out of control, and the sharing of examples of best practice being demonstrated across London.

¹ BBC website article 'Dog Owners Live Healthier Lives' quoting from academic research

² Source GLA, 31 March 2010

³ RSPCA figures

⁴ Figure quoted by Lord Toby Harris, Hansard, 21 June 2010

1.2 Local context

Within Southwark there continues to be a high level of public concern surrounding irresponsible ownership of dogs, and the consequences, including dog fouling, strays, antisocial and aggressive behaviour. Issues with antisocial dogs and dog fouling were listed as the second greatest concern of residents in the 2008 Southwark Place Survey.

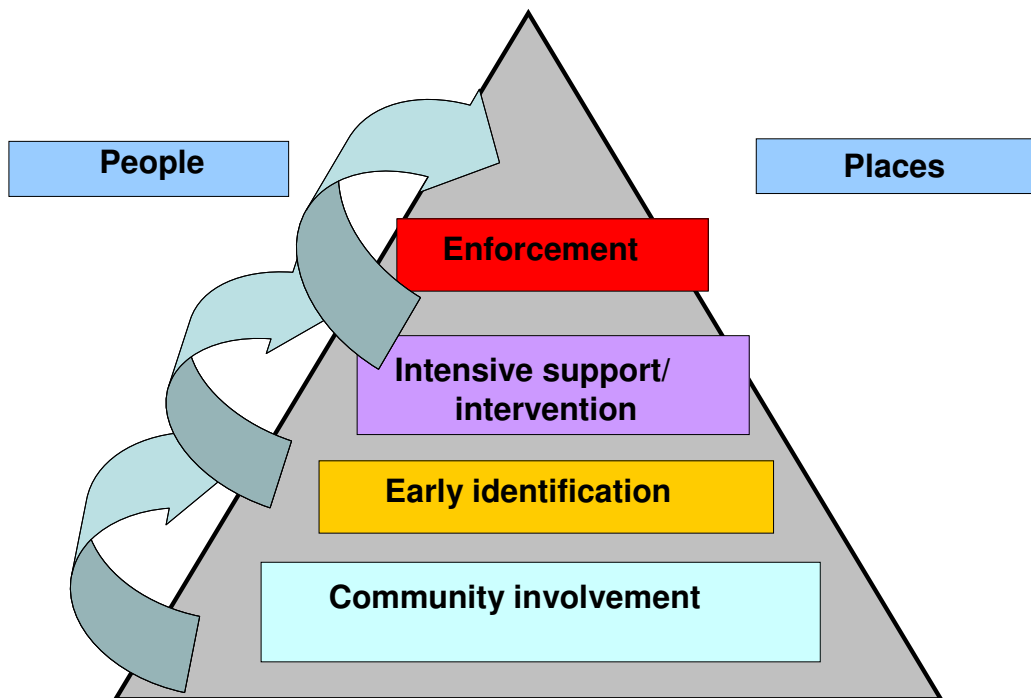
1.3 The Southwark approach

Safer Southwark Partnership (SSP) recognises the growing concerns around dog related issues at a local, regional and national level and has responded by bringing together all key departments and outside agencies that deliver specific services that impact on dog owners within the borough including those that play a key role in enforcing against irresponsible dog owners and incidents of dangerous dogs.

The SSP has developed a whole systems approach to tackling crime and antisocial behaviour based on our learning over the past 12 years. The diagram below (diagram 1) illustrates the four tiers that form the groundwork of any intervention we may put in place.

Diagram 1

Southwark - Delivering action and interventions



The Safer Southwark Partnership set up a specific group in April 2010 for the purpose of creating a multi agency partnership to deal with dog related issues in a more efficient, effective and more targeted way as well as identifying possible improvements to service delivery. This group consists of (from the local authority) community safety, housing, parks, waste management, and

communications. It also includes the Metropolitan Police, RSPCA, Battersea Dogs and Cats Home, Groundwork London and various voluntary agencies.

1.4 Aims and objectives

This strategy outlined how Southwark will deliver services that promote the value of dogs and encourages responsible ownership across Southwark, as well as continuing to tackle irresponsible dog owners and enforce quickly and robustly against incidents of aggressive dogs or dogs allowed to be dangerously out of control.

The strategy has been produced in partnership with all relevant departments to ensure that the document and recommendations within are realistic, deliverable and achievable.

There are two priority areas the strategy will strive to deliver against:

- Encouraging responsible dog ownership
- Tackling dog related ASB and dogs dangerously out of control

For each priority area the strategy will outline current and improved service provision across the partnership and detail what the partnership will strive to deliver in 2011 to 2014, giving consideration and recognition to any conceived restraints to resources and budgets.

2. Encouraging responsible dog ownership

The backbone of this strategy is to encourage and promote responsible dog ownership. We feel that it is important that we enable our communities to be able to make positive steps in their behaviour, as well as ensuring that they understand what the consequences are for acts of dog related ASB and allowing dogs to be out of control. Communicating effectively with the local communities and encouraging responsible dog ownership has a number of positive impacts on the local environment, residents across Southwark as well as reducing the burden on resources needed across the partnership that currently deal with and respond to issues of dog related ASB and incidents of dangerous dogs and dogs out of control.

2.1 Changes to tenancy conditions

In April 2010 Southwark housing department updated their tenancy handbook section 'being a good neighbour – reducing anti social behaviour, harassment and domestic violence' to inform residents of their need to obtain permission in order to keep a dog. Southwark Council's housing department will grant permission as long as:

- The dog is micro-chipped; and
- Pet and owner details are provided

The section of the handbook also advises residents on responsible dog ownership and their responsibility as a dog owner to pick up after their dog and not to allow it to be out of control. A number of actions can be taken against residents that breach tenancy terms and conditions and in serious circumstances notice to seek possession and even eviction can be sought.

In 2010 to 2011 Southwark Council's housing department distributed the revised tenancy handbook to all relevant residents and offered free micro-chipping days and services for those tenants wishing to register their dogs.

In 2011 the housing department will be continuing to educate residents on the tenancy handbook but will also be responding to complaints of dog related antisocial behaviour and nuisance and taking appropriate action against the tenant.

In 2010 to 2011 Southwark encouraged responsible dog ownership through a number of media and communications campaigns as well as through partnership led dog events and education sessions within schools. Key achievements within the year include:

2.2 Events

- Delivery of over 20 dog events within Southwark's housing estates and parks, offering free micro chipping, welfare advice, free or discounted neutering services, free dog bags, training and handling advice and competitions.
- Micro-chipped 240 dogs
- Over 800,000 free dog poo bags made available to local residents
- Delivery of education and awareness raising activities within a primary school and secondary school in areas where a number of dog related issues have been reported
- Partnership delivery of two estate action days offering intensive education and support to areas where a number of dog related issues have been reported.

2.3 Media and communications

- A two page article in the July/August issue of Southwark Life (which goes to every household in the borough) covering responsible ownership, and providing advice about services.
- An adshel poster campaign across the borough (September to November 2010) highlighting our successes in tackling dangerous dogs.
- News piece to promote the dog control order consultation and getting involved online Southwark Life, December 2010
- Facebook, twitter and other social media to discuss the dog control order regulations and issues of dog related antisocial behaviour.
- A number of articles in the South London press, Southwark news and time out promoting the dog control order consultation, dog events, results of BARK operations and issues of dog within parks including dogs attacking trees.
- Revision of relevant web pages for Southwark Council ensuring that local residents can access information on key responsible dog ownership messages and know how to report incidents of dog related antisocial behaviour.

Examples of media and communication

you said, we did

Southwark Council, the police and partners in the community are working hard to keep you safe.

You were worried about dangerous dogs in your area

The council and police got tough with irresponsible dog owners

...we've already seized 19 dangerous dogs, made 58 visits and issued nine warning letters

12 News

Best in show

It's now a condition of your tenancy that if you keep a dog at home, you need to let us know and have them microchipped. It's a quick and painless procedure that makes it easier to reunite you if your dog gets lost and we've teamed up with The Dogs Trust to do it for free, saving you up to £80 per pet.

Another trick tip to being a responsible owner is having your dog trained. As well as making sure the number of unwanted puppies is kept to a minimum, it's better for their health and behaviour, and helps to reduce the risk of injury. This includes socialising your dog, training for obedience, and regular exercise and company.

If you have your dog or cat a tag, you can call Southwark Council on 020 7525 2000.

To report dog barking, or anti-social behaviour, the noise or dog being allowed to damage trees, visit www.southwark.gov.uk or call 020 7525 1777.

Free microchipping events

Venue: Runway Row Park, Oak Street, SE17 3AL
Southwark Park, Goswell Road entrance, SE16 2UA
Brunswick Park, Gables Close, SE3 7BN
Bird in Bush Park, Bird in Bush Road, SE15 4RW

Date: 8 July, 2 September
22 July, 16 September
5 August, 16 September
18 August, 18 September

Free dog chipping

For all Southwark residents today

Safe and painless, your dog will be retraced to you should he ever get lost or stolen

Go to the wardens tent on the estate for more details

www.southwark.gov.uk/keepingyousafe

www.southwark.gov.uk/keepingyousafe

Recommendations

- To develop and deliver an effective communications strategy on responsible dog ownership
- To continue to deliver a number of partnership led dog events within parks and estate action days across Southwark
- To ensure that relevant website pages are kept up to date and remains informative on all areas of dog related services and events delivered across the borough
- To create a webpage in partnership with the police informing residents on the BARK project and that includes information on how to report incidents of dangerous dogs and dogs dangerously out of control
- To look at an education / media campaign informing local residents of the need to have a collar and tag on their dog at all times under the Control of Dogs Order 1992

3. Tackling dog related ASB and dogs dangerously out of control

3.1 Tackling dog related ASB

A number of local authority departments invest resources into tackling irresponsible owners and incidents of dog related ASB, using a number of different legislative powers available to them. Some of the work being undertaken by these departments as well as proposed delivery for 2011 to 2014 is outlined below.

Dog control orders

The Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005 and The Dog Control Orders Regulations 2006 empowers local authorities to make dog control orders (DCOs) that prescribe offences for:

- Failing to remove dog faeces
- Not keeping a dog on a lead
- Not putting, and keeping, a dog on a lead when directed to do so by an authorised officer
- Permitting a dog to enter land from which dogs are excluded
- Taking more than a specified number of dogs onto land

Where DCO regulations are implemented offenders can be issued on the spot fines (£50) or if prosecuted, be ordered to pay a fine of up to £1,000.

There are a number of requirements for making dog control orders. These include:

- Showing that the orders are a necessary and proportionate response to problems caused by the activities of dogs and those in charge of them
- The interests of those in charge of dogs must be balanced against the interests of those affected by the activities of dogs
- The practicalities of enforcement of the dog control orders must be considered

In November 2010 Southwark Council undertook a borough wide public consultation to establish whether or not there was a need and a desire to introduce DCO regulations for:

- Failing to remove dog fouling (fouling of land by dogs order) - all public land borough wide
- Not putting and keeping a dog on a lead when asked to by an authorised officer (dogs to be placed on a lead when requested by an authorised officer) - all public land borough wide.
- Permitting a dog to enter an area from which it is excluded (dogs exclusion order) - specific areas only i.e. gated children's play areas

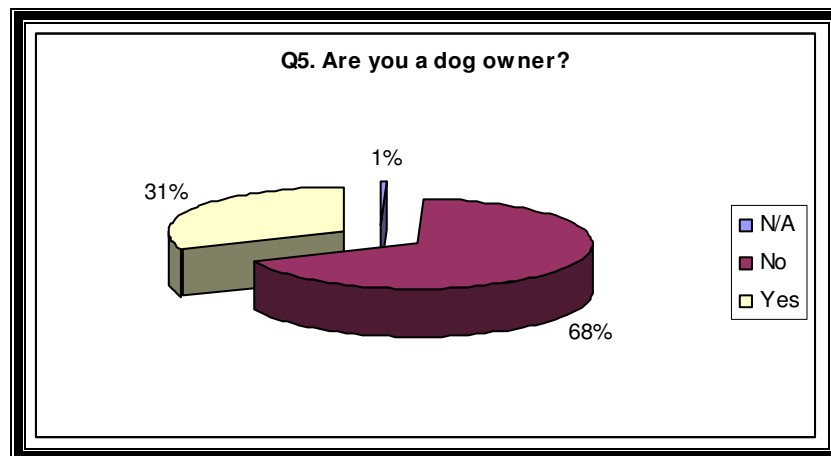
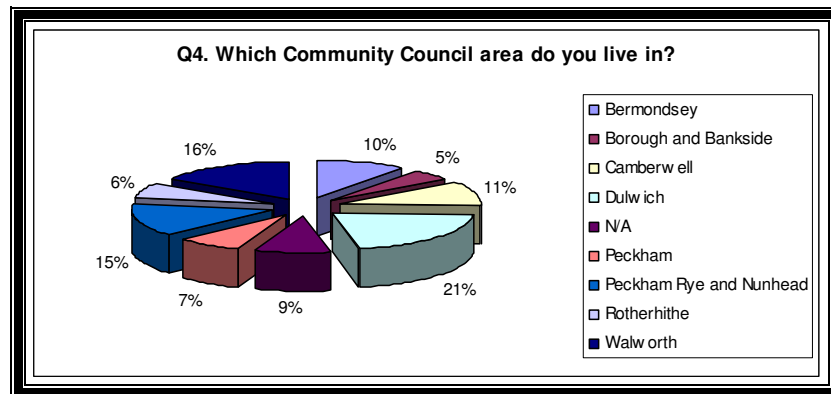
The consultation process included a generic questionnaire (survey) that was made available in two formats, a paper copy and an online version. These were issued to residents through various mediums as outlined below:

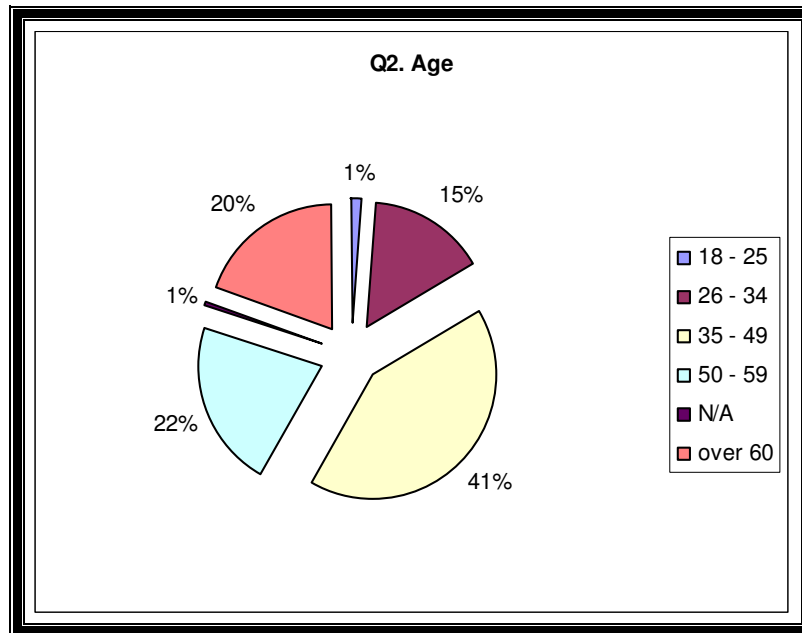
- Southwark corporate website
- Tenants Resident and Association's and related websites
- Eight community council area meetings
- 21 ward panel meetings
- Cemeteries and Crematorium's
- Community wardens and park liaison team
- Various Southwark Council public events
- Local press

3.2 Results

The dog control order consultation took place over a three and a half month period on a borough wide basis. The consultation began on 1 November 2010 with the final date for representations on Tuesday 15 February 2011.

Over 400 responses were received to date from both dog owners and non dog owners alike, from across the borough and from a diverse age range.





The evaluation of the consultation showed overwhelming support for the local authority to implement all three of the dog control order regulations specified. In February 2011 'more effective responses to antisocial behaviour - a consultation' was launched by the home office in which they are consulting on plans to streamline the toolkit used to tackle antisocial behaviour. This consultation also impacts on current legislation used to deal with dog related anti social behaviour i.e. Dog Control Orders that are currently being used in a number of local authorities and may repeal any current DCOs being used currently. The consultation ends in May 2011 and Southwark are currently waiting the results of this consultation and the impact of any changes to the toolkit before moving forward and implementing the DCO regulations.

Recommendations

1. To implement a borough wide order, in line with new legislation to promote responsible dog ownership
2. To undertake intelligence gathering and data capture on a bi monthly basis in order to undertake targeted enforcement operations in the worst affected areas for dog fouling within the borough.
- 3 To continue to respond to reports of dog fouling across the borough using the dedicated resources available within cleansing.
- 4 To ensure that a programme of educational and awareness raising messages is undertaken by the partnership includes information on dog fouling, the health implications and the use of waste bins for disposal of bagged dog mess. Stickers to be placed on bins across Southwark by August 2011 and information provided to schools
- 5 To continue to provide free dog bags through local libraries, parks offices, at dog events and operations.

Dog fouling

Under the Dogs Fouling of Land Act it is an offence to not pick up after your dog and dispose of it responsibly. Officers within the community safety and enforcement unit have the power to issue fixed penalty notices of £50 to any one who has been witnessed not picking up after their dog. Non payment of the fixed penalty notice can lead to receiving a fine of up to £1000.

In 2010 to 2011 there were a total of 3482 reports and requests for dog waste clearance reported through our environmental call centre, street leader scheme and community wardens. Southwark's response to reports of dog mess include clearance of the dog mess (usually within 4hrs of reporting) by deploying one of the two dedicated vehicles and operatives currently in place.

Officers undertake dog fouling operations in specific areas of concern that have been identified through intelligence provided by the local community. These operations usually involve education of local residents about their responsibilities and possible fines as well as the issuing of fixed penalty notices to residents who are seen not to pick up after their dogs.

There are around 700 dog bins across Southwark and there is regular demand from the public for more. Southwark has responded to this by ensuring that the public are made aware that ordinary waste bins can also be used to dispose of dog mess as long as it is bagged. In November 2010 educational stickers were produced and by August 2011 will be fixed to every waste bin in Southwark.

Achievements in 2010 to 2011

- Officers undertook over 480 dog fouling operations across the borough
- Provision of over 800,000 free dog bags through libraries, parks offices, events and operations
- 98 percent clearance of dog fouling incidents reported within the four hour response time are cleared

In 2011 dog fouling operations will fall specifically under the remit of the community warden service. New targeted ways of working and enforcement against irresponsible dog owners specifically for dog fouling is currently being arranged and will be implemented as of May 2011.

Dogs damaging trees

In one six month period (July to December 2010) in Southwark over 140 trees suffered damage from dogs. Work carried out specifically in response to dog damage has cost the taxpayer well over £2,000, on top of the costs of replacing those trees that have died.

Dogs are being encouraged to attack trunks, hang from branches and bite off tree bark as the attacks strengthen the jaws of dogs and can be an indication of antisocial behaviour.

Background info on how and why dogs damage trees can be found at the following link: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/aug/11/urban-trees-destroyed-fighting-dogs>

In November 2010 the council formally adopted its tree management strategy to improve the way it manages over 50,000 trees under its care throughout the borough and includes a dogs and trees action plan demonstrating a commitment to tackling damage to trees caused by dogs.

Recommendations

6. To take action against offenders through prosecution under park byelaws (for those directly witnessed) or antisocial behaviour action (in response to community intelligence).
7. To work with Friends of Parks to develop dog owner networks to identify and report issues effectively.
8. To continue a programme to grease trees, put tree guards in place and crown lift trees in parks across Southwark to prevent damage.
9. To update all park notice boards with standard responsible dog ownership and dog damage to trees notices.
10. Put up notices by dog damaged trees to raise awareness of the consequences of dog damage to trees.
11. Collect information about the profile of people who perpetrate dog damage, the types of dogs and times of day when damage happens so that targeted enforcement can be undertaken.

Stray dogs provision

Every year over 300,000 dogs go astray in the UK, which is not only upsetting for their owners but can raise a number of issues including animal welfare issues, concerns over public safety, problems with dog fouling and an increased likelihood of a stray causing a road traffic accident.

Under section 68 of the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005 the obligation to collect stray dogs was passed from the police to the local authority. This new legal duty came into effect on 6 April 2008.

Under section 149(1) of the EPA 1990 the local authority must appoint an officer for the purpose of discharging their stray dogs function. This authority can be further delegated under section 149(2).

Southwark Council's, strategic director for environment retains the overall responsibility for ensuring that the authority's stray dog functions are discharged correctly. However, the day to day functions are currently delegated to the environmental enforcement officers who sit within this division.

Over the last four years Southwark Council have collected 673 stray dogs. There has been a year on year rise.

Year	2007	2008	2009	Jan 2010 – March 2011
Number	56	196	212	209

Southwark Council are currently reviewing their stray dog provision within the borough for 2011 to 2012.

Recommendations

12. Ensuring that any changes to the stray dog provision within Southwark meets the local authorities' statutory obligation and is communicated to the general public and to key partners.
13. To continue to work in partnership under the BARK project and that comprehensive intelligence gathering and sharing of information to deter and disrupt dangerous behaviour and to seize dangerous or banned breeds continues to be a success.
14. To continue to take action against owners of status and / or dangerous dogs, through criminal prosecutions, antisocial behaviour legislation or tenancy enforcement.
15. To further improve intelligence gathering, it is recommended that police officers make specific reference to any dangerous or antisocial dogs via the CRIS reporting system. This database will then be interrogated for information prior to each BARK meeting.
16. To continue to ensure that all front line services within the local authority are aware of how to report incidents of status and dangerous dogs through training and identification of a single point of contact.
17. To develop a specific webpage hosted by Southwark Council and the Police which provides the public with information on BARK, including a public referral form. The site will be updated every three months sharing good news stories, statistics and reassurance messages.
18. For the BARK partnership to keep up to date on current and proposed legislation that may support the project, specifically around tackling the supply of status dogs through breeding and sales.

3.3 Dogs dangerously out of control

Borough action for responsible K9s (BARK)

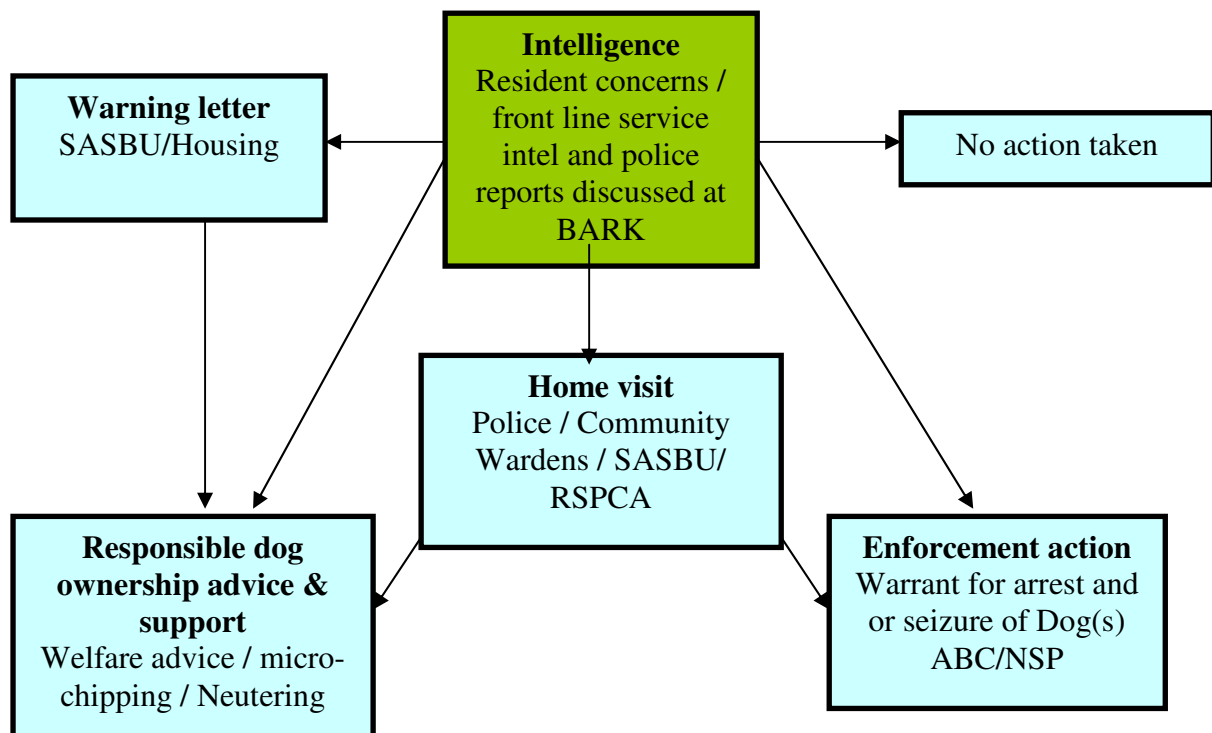
In June 2010 Southwark Police and Southwark Council set up Borough Action for Responsible K9s (BARK) so that incidents of dangerous dogs and dogs dangerously out of control could be tackled in a more effective way.

BARK meetings are held every four to six weeks where information and intelligence from police, front line staff and local residents about the location dogs of concern are discussed and an appropriate level of action agreed and taken forward. This includes:

- No action to be taken and case closed (e.g. insufficient intelligence or seriousness of incident to warrant a BARK intervention)
- Referral – either to wardens/police for informal action or words of advice at a later date, or the RSPCA as an animal welfare issue
- Warning letter – unacceptable behaviour has been reported, and a letter noting concern, but also providing offers of support and assistance is sent to the owner
- Home visit – to follow up issues of concern by investigating on site and gathering more information. A home visit will also provide support, for example by micro-chipping the dog or providing welfare information
- Antisocial behaviour action – will usually be preceded by a home visit. If the intelligence warrants it then action such as an acceptable behaviour contract, tenancy enforcement, or an injunction could follow
- Seizure of dogs - This will follow on from a home visit, and will be conducted under warrant by the police, usually with the support of the Status Dogs Unit. Seizure of dogs will be undertaken using the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 Section 1 (banned breeds) or under Section 3 of the same legislation where it has been evidenced that the dog is dangerously out of control
- Further investigation or prosecution – will follow action from the police, and may be for breaches of earlier undertakings (e.g. maintaining court requirements of the dangerous dogs register, or for other criminal issues that have been identified via the BARK home visits

Visits to addresses of concern are usually organised a maximum of two weeks after the BARK meeting is held, however, where a serious incident of a dangerous dog i.e. an attack is reported this is dealt with immediately by the police.

Basic operational principles of the Southwark BARK is shown below:



Achievements in 2010 to 2011

To date the BARK partnership has:

- Discussed over 100 cases
- Conducted 67 visits
- Issued 32 warning letters
- Issued seven ABCs
- Issued one notice to seek possession
- Micro-chipped 21 dogs
- Executed over eight warrants
- Seized 30 dogs (prohibitive breeds)

Access to new powers

As of January 2011 the police and local authority have access to new powers under the Policing and Crime Act 2009 whereby an application can be made to a county court for an injunction against an individual who has been involved in gang related violence. Gang injunctions allow courts to place a range of prohibitions and requirements on the behaviour or activities of an individual, one of these prohibitions can be that the individual is not allowed to own a dog. The partnership currently works closely with Southwark antisocial behaviour unit (SASBU) and will where possible recommend use of this specific prohibition where incidents of serious dog related ASB has been evidenced.