AGENDA 13, Enc xi) Report to Ashington Town Council on Dog Fouling Issues

Background
Following concerns raised by Councillors Gemma Hemsley and Mark Purvis regarding dog fouling in Ashington, the Executive Officer contacted the Principal Environmental Enforcement Officer at Northumberland County Council (NCC) to obtain information on enforcement activity and complaint levels within the town. The findings are summarised below.

Enforcement Resources in Northumberland

There are **nine** Environmental Enforcement Officers covering the county. However:

- **Two** officers are funded by Town Councils and work exclusively for those areas.
- **One** officer is dedicated to the Fly-Tipping Initiative and manages CCTV for Ashington.
- This effectively leaves **six officers** to cover the remainder of Northumberland.

There are **four Animal Welfare Officers** across Northumberland, one spends a lot of time in Ashington.

Dog Fouling Complaints in Ashington (1st January 2024 – February 2025)
Total complaints received: **107** This equates to less than two a week on average**.**
(For comparison, **127** complaints were recorded in Blyth during the same period.)

Breakdown by Ward

1. Bothal – **17** complaints
2. College – **20** complaints
3. Central – **18** complaints
4. Hirst – **24** complaints
5. Haydon – **12** complaints
6. Seaton & Newbiggin West – **16** complaints

Enforcement Actions Taken

- **No Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs)** were issued in Ashington during this period.
- **Five warning letters** were sent to dog owners following complaints.

Warning letters are typically only issued when residents report persistent offences outside normal working hours. During working hours, officers aim to attend the location in person.

Patrols & Follow-Up Actions

The Animal Welfare Officer covering Ashington is active in the town, but **patrol frequency and specific locations are not recorded**.

Officers **always** visit areas where complaints are received and, where necessary, conduct follow-up patrols.

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Conclusion & Considerations for Ashington Town Council

1. **Enforcement Limitations** – With only six officers covering the whole of Northumberland, enforcement capacity is limited. Ashington is not uniquely disadvantaged but shares this limitation with other towns.
2. **Lack of Fines Issued** – Despite 107 complaints, no Fixed Penalty Notices have been issued, raising concerns about deterrence effectiveness.
3. **Need for Clearer Patrol Data** – There is no formal record of patrol frequency or areas covered by the Animal Welfare Officer, making it difficult to assess coverage levels.
4. **Potential for Greater Awareness & Reporting** – With no fines issued, residents may feel discouraged from reporting. Improved awareness of how to report and the impact of reporting could help increase enforcement action. The Council has already attempted to address this issue with a Facebook post encouraging proper reporting, which gained **33 shares and 14 comments**. The engagement highlighted concerns about the lack of fines, the importance of reporting, scepticism about the effectiveness of reporting, and the difficulty in catching offenders. However, it is important to acknowledge that dog fouling enforcement is an **NCC responsibility**, and despite the Council's efforts to promote proper reporting, some backlash was directed at Ashington Town Council.

Recommendations

- Work with NCC to explore options for **more proactive patrols** in problem areas.
- Consider **campaigns to encourage reporting**, reinforcing that official reports (not social media posts) lead to action.
- Request **regular patrol data** from NCC to track enforcement efforts.
- Investigate what could **increase enforcement presence** in Ashington.
- Seek NCC **Green Dog Walkers'** presence at Ashington Market or other community events, as they have successfully visited other towns to promote responsible dog ownership and public education.

This report is provided for Council's consideration and discussion on potential next steps to address dog fouling in Ashington.