Barking and Dagenham will be the first Council in the UK to use DNA testing to catch irresponsible pet owners who fail to clean up after their pooh’s pooh as part of the authority’s drive to promote social responsibility.

The east London Council will introduce DNA testing on dog mess to identify rogue owners who could face fines of up to £80. The Council's annual cleansing budget is £2.3million which includes clearing up dog faeces. The Council employs a dedicated dog warden to deal with this and other issues.

The innovative approach will be unveiled at a Dog Fouling Forum, called, ‘Leading a New Way’, taking place on Tuesday, 28 April at Barking Learning Centre from 1pm – 3.30pm. The Leader of the Council, Councillor Darren Rodwell, will open the forum before guest speakers representing the Kennel Club, Keep Britain Tidy and Streetkleen (licence holders for PooPrints DNA testing), give key speeches on the subject.

Councillor Darren Rodwell, said: “We are the first Council in the country to get really tough on dog mess and pet owners who do not act in a socially responsible way. The vast majority of dog owners in Barking and Dagenham are socially responsible but unfortunately a selfish few think it’s ok to not clean up after their pet.

“Dog mess not only spoils our streets - it’s also a health hazard and especially to young children. It’s why we are using this innovative approach in making a cleaner, healthier and better Barking and Dagenham.”

Proposals to be discussed are how we could encourage owners have their dog’s DNA registered with PooPrints UK, and how this could work with the forthcoming requirement from April 2016 for all dogs to be microchipped. Collecting DNA is a painless cheek swab would be taken from the dog, which is sent to a laboratory. The dog's profile is then added to a DNA registry.

If an owner fails to pick up after their pooch, a quick test will be taken from the offending faeces which can be traced back to a registered dog with 99.9 per cent accuracy.

Streetkleen Managing Director, Gary Downie, said: “I believe the combination of DNA testing and enforcement could be the most effective means of ensuring owners are held accountable for their dog's actions. In the US, we have experienced reductions in dog fouling by as much as 90 per cent after introducing the programme.

“For the vast majority of responsible dog owners this should pose no problem at all. In fact, we believe that the minimal cost involved in the DNA testing will pose value for money when the selfish minority of dog owners are brought to task and public spaces in Barking and Dagenham become cleaner, greener and more pleasant environments for everyone.”

The forum will explore current legislation and how to overcome obstacles. It will also look at introducing a pilot and if the pilot is successful, then it will be rolled out across the borough from September 2016. If anyone is interested in attending the forum, they should contact Jacqui.harris@lbld.gov.uk. Residents can join the discussion on Twitter by tagging their opinions about dog fouling by using the hashtag #leadinganewway.

For more information, or to arrange an interview or photo opportunity, please contact Hazel Minns at Barking and Dagenham Council on 020 8227 2106 or email hazel.minns@lbld.gov.uk.

Notes to editors:

PooPrints - Welsh biotech company, Streetkleen, is rolling out PooPrints UK on behalf of US firm, BioPet Vet Lab. PooPrints operates in 45 states of America, as well as in Canada and in trial programmes in Israel, Singapore and now the UK.

The Pet Food Manufacturer’s Association (PFMA) estimated that there were around nine million pet dogs in the UK in 2014, with nearly a quarter of all households (24 per cent) owning a dog who produce an incredible 1,000 tonnes of faeces every day, with much of it thought to be deposited in public areas.

A recent report by Keep Britain Tidy suggests that the hidden cost of littering is as much as £1billion a year in England alone. Even back in 2005, a staggering £22 million (up to £100,000 per authority) was estimated to go
towards dog waste collection, disposal and related costs – like dedicated dog waste bins, street cleansing, enforcement activities, signage and public communications – according to The Waste Improvement Network.

The human cost is just as high. Toxocariasis is an infection caused by roundworm parasites, called Toxocara, found in the faeces of dogs, cats and in contaminated soil. 288 cases across England/Wales were reported through laboratory testing during 1989 to 2002. More recent figures from the Health Protection Agency (HPA) only recorded 30 cases across the country. Estimated rate of infections is around 0.2 per 100,000 people in the population. This suggests that we have one case every two years in Barking and Dagenham.

Dog fouling is one of the most pressing and emotive anti-social problems nationwide and is one of the most common causes of complaints to MP’s, local authorities and local councillors. Four in 10 people consider it to be a problem in their area and believe that it is on the rise. Dog waste also poses a significant economic impact by deterring inward investment and tourism to an area.

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