

Covid-19 Community Response

Dog Walking Policy

This is our policy that provides guidance and procedures for both dog owners and community responders who volunteer to walk dogs for members of the community who are unable to do so themselves due to the virus and/or their personal health circumstances.

Potential risks identified with community response dog walking activity:

- Risk of injury to volunteer walker or dog
- Risk of injury to a member of the public or another dog
- Risk of damage to property
- Potential cost to dog owner (through the dog injuring a person, dog or damaging property)
- Potential liability of the volunteer walker if they do not have adequate control of the dog
- Transmission of the virus; although there is no evidence of dogs being able to catch and transmit the virus to humans, their fur/coat and dog leads are surfaces where the virus could be found and transmitted from person to person.
- Transmission of the virus from owner to walker at handover

In normal circumstances dogs would get to know potential walkers - so even calm and easy-going dogs may not react well when picked up by a stranger.

To minimise these risks, we ask the following guidelines are observed:

- Owners 'book' all walks through Healthwatch Bracknell Forest so they (HWBF) are aware of all owners and volunteers coming into contact with each other and, in the event of any incident, are aware of the parties involved
- Priority will be given to those owners who are 'shielded' or isolated and have no one else to walk the dog; particularly those with no garden
- Only one dog to be walked at a time

- The dog owner must provide Healthwatch Bracknell Forest with evidence of insurance
- The dog owner agrees to disclose any issues regarding the dog (dislike of bicycles for example) at the time of booking the walk and to confirm the dog does not have a history of aggression. They will also share details of the dogs breed and size and maybe even a photograph
- The volunteer will be provided with a community response volunteer T-shirt and identification (which can only be used for official Healthwatch Bracknell Forest community response tasks)
- The volunteer at no time enters into the home of the dog owner
- Handover occurs in the safest way possible. If any aspect of handover makes the volunteer uncomfortable or unsafe the walk is aborted
- The volunteer wears gloves (these can be provided) at all times during the walk and observes the government guidelines to keep safe (social distancing, not touching face etc.)
- The volunteer keeps the dog on lead at all times
- If there are any issues with the dog's behaviour the walk is terminated early
- The owner is to supply poop bags and, if there is no suitable dog poop bin on the walk, agrees to take the full poop bags back and dispose of
- The volunteer dog walker agrees to pick up any dog mess on the walk and, if there is a suitable dog poop bin that is not full, on the walk route dispose of or return to dog owner
- The volunteer does not unnecessarily pet/touch the dog
- The volunteer does not allow anyone else to touch or pet the dog at all
- The return of the dog and the handover to the owner occurs in the safest way possible.
- The volunteer lets the dog owner know of any issues
- The volunteer leaves full poop bags with owner (if applicable)
- It is recommended that the dog owner bathes or wipes down the dog on its return to minimise risk of transmission from the dog's fur/cost
- The volunteer removes and disposes of gloves safely as soon as task is over and washes hands as soon as possible
- The volunteer provides feedback to Healthwatch (through the local coordinators or if arranged direct to the office); it is important that any concerns are shared for everyone's safety

Healthwatch Bracknell Forest does not accept any liability for injury or damages arising from community response volunteer dog walking activity.