

Insufficient evidence to support dog ban in cemeteries

Dogs will continue to be allowed in Edinburgh's cemeteries after campaigners called for a ban in response to claims some had urinated on graves.

Edinburgh Council said there was "insufficient evidence" to tighten the rules following a review.

Efforts to reinstate a 'no dogs in cemeteries' rule in place before Covid-19 have been led by Paul Irvine, who said his family had been left distressed after owners repeatedly allowed their dog to disturb his son Xander's grave in Morningside Cemetery.

Some have even ripped the heads off soft toys left for the three year-old, who tragically died after being struck by a car in 2020.

Mr Irvine believes exceptions should be made for assistance dogs and those assisting mourners visiting graves but that in general dog walkers should be prohibited from cemeteries as the current rules which say dogs must be kept on leads, introduced in 2022, are "vague".

He said: "They just walk wherever they want, they don't stick to the paths, they're on the long leads. Sometimes they have the dogs way behind them on the long leads, they're on their phones, they're not aware of what the dog's doing."

In a plea on a local Facebook group he said "most" of those he

sees "let their dogs urinate on graves and headstones".

However the council has now concluded it does not have the evidence or resources to support a ban.

Observations carried out by officers found a number of cemeteries were used for dog walking but the majority of owners did so "in a respectful manner".

A report said: "Where dog owners are observed with their dog off-lead, they are asked to adhere to the Cemetery Management Rules' and they generally comply with this request.

"Officers have identified that at Warriston and East Preston Street Cemeteries there appears to be less adherence to this rule, with certain individuals repeatedly letting their dogs off lead and becoming challenging when spoken to by officers. These individuals will be asked in the coming weeks not to return.

"Committee requested consideration of enforcing a 'no dogs' requirement in cemeteries. Whilst there are some issues, there is an insufficient evidence base to conclude that it would be proportionate to further tighten the rules.

"Further, to enforce a 'no dog' rule would require a significant increase in officer resources."

A petition started by Morningside resident Andy Lees in response to a plea by Mr Irvine on a local Facebook group has so far collected over 2,000 signatures.

A counter-petition to 'halt the petitioned ban on dogs in Edinburgh cemeteries' has received just over 1,200.

Petitioner Monti Stramka said: "There are a multitude of reasons that people legitimately visit cemeteries alongside the main one of visiting a loved one and we do not feel someone should miss out on this just because they have a well behaved dog when it is a minority causing issues.

"We wouldn't ban everyone wearing a hoodie if groups of hoodie wearing people were causing trouble in cemeteries.

"We do not feel that a ban would be followed by current rules breakers which we believe are in a minority."

Mr Lees said: "People views these places as sacred ground. They have a very specific purpose and the needs of the bereaved need to be at the core of that purpose.

"There are plenty other spaces which are more appropriate for exercising a dog."

He said the previous rule disallowing dogs in graveyards was "decades-old" and should be reinstated.

"Covid came at an unfortunate time because everybody was housebound and dogs need to be exercised, so people were going to places near their residence, I can understand that, but it now seems to have become the norm and that needs to change," he said.

A report, which will go before the culture and communities committee next Thursday, August 8, said: "Cemeteries that are regularly used by dog walkers are generally regarded as safer spaces by those individuals.

"Eight people have written to the Council to complain about dogs in cemeteries since the last committee report on this subject."

By Donald Turvill Local Democracy Reporter