

**Agenda Item No:**

**Report To:** Cabinet

**Date of Meeting:** 25<sup>th</sup> of January 2024

**Report Title:** Housing Pet Policy

**Report Author & Job Title:** Anthony Crossley  
Neighbourhood Services Manager

**Portfolio Holder** Cllr. Bill Barrett  
**Portfolio Holder for:** Housing



**Summary:**

The Housing Neighbourhoods Services Team propose to introduce a pet policy for Council Housing (Appendix A).

Currently many households have pets and they are not currently required to notify the Council when introducing a pet to their home. For some households, such as sheltered housing are not permitted to have a pet. This policy is to formalise the process so the Council knows of the pets within properties but also to extend pet ownership to those that could benefit from having a pet, such as a single elderly person within sheltered housing.

The purpose of the new pet policy is to formalise arrangements for when and how it is possible to have pets as part of a household, helping to guide Housing Officers and the tenants through the process, and to give greater clarity to our tenants about their obligations when keeping pets in their home.

As part of the new pet policy, we are proposing to introduce and keep a record of a pet permission request, this will enable us to gather the information needed for the Neighbourhood Housing Officer to make a decision following an application.

The Council will not withhold approval unless there is a clear reason for doing so, such as an excesses number of pets. Decisions will be turned around in 14 working days.

It should be noted that pets already in the home will not be affected by this policy and current tenants can retain their pets. The Council will also permit residents to move their pets during a housing transfer/move within our stock.

**Key Decision:** NO

<b>Significantly Affected Wards:</b>	None
<b>Recommendations:</b>	<b>The Cabinet is recommended to:-</b>
<b>Policy Overview:</b>	<p><b>I. To recommend the implementation and commencement of the Housing Pet Policy</b>  Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2024 - 2027</p>
<b>Financial Implications:</b>	There are no financial implications from introducing this policy.
<b>Legal Implications</b> <i>Text agreed by Principal Litigator on 02.01.24</i>	Although there is no statutory duty to have a policy for Pets in Social Housing, the adoption of a policy aids to guide would be applicants, officers, members, and the public on how the authority will consider and deal with such matters. As such it appears pragmatic to maintain such a policy, and from time to time review the policy when there is change to guidance, legislation or case law.
<b>Equalities Impact Assessment</b>	See Attached
<b>Other Material Implications:</b>	None
<b>Exempt from Publication:</b>	<b>NO</b>
<b>Background Papers:</b>	<b>None</b>
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## Report Title: Housing Pet Policy

### Introduction and Background

1. The Council does not have a formal pet policy covering all tenanted properties. Those in the Council's general needs stock can own as many pets as they like and the Council does not hold any records of pets being held.
2. Those living in independent living properties are not currently allowed to have pets in their homes and this forms part of their tenancy agreement. If this policy is approved, their tenancy agreement will be amended. The policy aims to address this and provide the opportunity for our independent living scheme tenants to apply to home a pet.

### Considerations around introducing a Housing Pet Policy

3. There has been a steady rise in pet ownership in recent years, in particular dogs with dog ownership in the UK rising to 11 million (29% of population) in 2023 from 10.1 million (26% of population) in 2020, Source: Pet Populations – PDSA.
4. We recognise that pet ownership can have a positive impact on a person(s) mental and physical well being because of the happiness and companionship it can bring the persons life.
5. The Neighbourhood Services Team have had an increased number of anti-social behaviour (ASB) reports about dogs barking, being intimidating and causing arguments between neighbours. There have been 10 reports so far in 2023. The policy will help the Council control the number of pets in a property and reduce reports related to ASB these are usually received due to noise or safety concerns.

### Proposal – next steps

6. Following endorsement of the pet policy our existing tenancy agreements will be amended to state that tenants must seek permission before keeping pets in their home. This will formalise the process of having pets within the Council's Housing stock.
7. A formal policy and procedure will also help tenants who are planning a move or welcoming a new pet into their household to understand what is appropriate for the property under consideration or that they are bidding for.
8. This policy will not apply retrospectively for tenants that already have pets but will apply to any new pets the tenant may wish to home, requiring them to apply for permission, as per the policy and mended tenancy agreement.

9. Although the policy will not apply retrospectively the team will work to record pet ownership information to help with safeguarding of officers and tenants. This will be achieved through tenancy audits, visits to properties and during viewings. We will record the type and number of pets in our homes and whilst this will obviously change over time, it will be continually updated.
10. The team will identify where there are increasing reports of issues in relation to pets and anti social behaviour, which will help to safeguard staff and visitors when visiting the property. We can use this policy along with tenancy agreement to justify proportionate enforcement actions to target any pet related anti-social behaviour.
11. The Neighbourhood Services Team has reviewed pet homing for our customers taking into consideration recent Government legislation which encourages social housing landlords to be positive towards allowing their customers to home a pet.
12. Part of this agenda is to combat loneliness within some of our communities including for vulnerable people, allowing more tenants to own a pet within our properties.

### **Additional options considered but discarded**

13. Continue without a housing pet policy, this is not good practice because it will deprive some of our most vulnerable tenants in our independent living schemes the opportunity of having a pet and experiencing the positive health and well being benefits that may bring...
14. There is a risk that without control of the number of pets in our properties ASB reports will rise impacting on the lives of those in the community as well as workloads of the team dealing with these reports.

### **Implications and Risk Assessment**

15. If the policy is not adopted, it will continue to make it difficult for Housing to manage what type and amount of pets our tenants are homing. Without a Policy and the appropriate amendment to the tenancy agreements in place we may find it more difficult to enforce removal of the pet or indeed action against a tenancy. Whilst we work closely with the relevant agencies around pets and anti social behaviour, responsibility for action can fall to the Housing Service and we therefore require this policy to enable the desired enforcement.
16. Without a formal policy in place our current and future tenants in our independent living schemes will not be able to have a pet, which in turn may have a negative impact on their current or future mental and physical well-being because of loneliness. Both Central government and the NHS have acknowledged the health impacts of loneliness when people are able to have or care for a pet. This may be a contributing factor to more vulnerable tenants becoming unwell and therefore adding pressure to the NHS.

17. If a formal policy is not adopted the Housing Service will continue to offer an inconsistent, adhoc approach to whether it is appropriate for a pet to be in our accommodation. This would not be favourable, it would rely on professional judgement but may lead to challenge from tenants.

## **Equalities Impact Assessment**

18. Completed and attached.

## **Consultation Planned or Undertaken**

19. Informal consultation carried out through Dahlia Independent Living forum.

## **Reasons for Supporting Option Recommended**

20. Potential improvements to mental and physical wellbeing of our tenants.
21. Helping to stop any animals under the Dangerous Animals Act 1976 being homed as pets in Council stock.
22. Having better oversight of which of our tenants' own pets, particularly dogs, will help us to deal with any reports of nuisance or anti-social behaviour caused by the animals more swiftly, therefore reducing the emotional harm or distress to victims.

## **Next Steps in Process**

23. If Cabinet approves this policy and agrees to the recommendations, Housing will commence engagement with the Council's tenants.
24. Amend tenancy agreements in conjunction with Legal, adding a clause that instructs tenants to adhere to the pet policy. This will be shared with Moat Homes in respect of the PFI properties on Stanhope as they use and adhere to the tenancy agreements and policies used by Ashford Borough Council.
25. Implement the changes to start on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024.

## **Conclusion**

26. By introducing a Pet Policy the Council and tenants can expect to see the following benefits:
  - This policy will allow our tenants that reside in our independent living schemes to enjoy pet ownership for the first time. As highlighted earlier in this report, this will contribute to mental and physical well improvements for these tenants.
  - Help the Council to stop breeding of dogs in our tenants homes
  - Build a database of tenants who own cats/dogs..

- It will be a tool to support enforcement of our tenancy agreement against a tenant(s) if they allow their Pet(s) to cause a nuisance, damage to our properties or health and safety hazard to the surrounding community.

## **Portfolio Holder's Views**

27. I welcome this report and support the implementation of the Housing Pet Policy. This policy supports all of our tenants in all of our HRA stock to own a pet(s) in a responsible, lawful and safe manner. It will also help residents in our independent living schemes to own a pet for the first time which may bring great benefits to their physical and mental wellbeing. This policy will also, through the use of the Neighbourhood Services Team, give us a policy foundation to provide oversight of pet ownership and to enforce cases where tenant's pets are causing distress to other residents.

## **Contact and Email**

28. Anthony Crossley – [anthony.crossley@ashford.gov.uk](mailto:anthony.crossley@ashford.gov.uk)

# Housing Pet Policy 2024 - 2027



## **Policy Statement**

Ashford Borough Council Housing recognises that pet ownership can be very beneficial for the wellbeing of our tenants, improving mental health, reducing loneliness and can help maintain a healthy and active lifestyle.

This policy is for all our tenants to allow pets in all our properties whilst ensuring the wellbeing of every animal and the surrounding community.

The Council will liaise with the dog warden and animal welfare organisations to ensure the best possible advice, information and expertise are readily available to help tenants look after their pet.

This policy aims to make it clear what pets tenants can or cannot keep at their property and how we expect them and the tenants home to be looked after.

## **Can you afford a pet?**

Looking after a dog or cat can involve a significant financial commitment, including food, equipment, vet bills and medicine. It has been estimated in recent years that the average annual spend can be around £1,183 on a pet dog and £1,028 on a cat. Allowing for an average lifespan of six to eighteen years, the total cost of pet ownership adds up.

## **Looking after your pet and home**

Tenants should also consider how they will exercise their pet, what happens if they becomes unwell or are no longer able to look after it, holiday arrangements and the potential extra cleaning in the home.

## **Choosing a pet**

When choosing a pet, we recommend that tenants seek a pet that needs rehoming from an animal shelter. This will help reduce third party breeding.

## **More information**

For further information on the Animal Welfare Act and other advice about keeping pets go to [www.rspca.org.uk](http://www.rspca.org.uk)

## **Permission for new tenants or new pets for existing tenants**

We will give permission to a tenant to keep a pet if the property is suitable and they are able to take on the responsibilities of looking after the pet. We will also take into consideration whether the tenancy has been breached in any way, for example but not limited, rent arrears due to non-payment of rent, no access for urgent or mandatory



repair works, anti-social behaviour or not looking after the property as set out in the tenancy agreement.

Tenants who wish to have a pet in their home will be asked to complete a pet application form, this is for either a dog or cat and tenants will confirm and provide evidence that these animals have been neutered and microchipped.

We will usually give consent to changes tenants might need to make to their property suitable to accommodate your pet, such as a cat flap, as long as it is agreed that removal and making good the changes are undertaken by the tenant if changes are no longer required, the tenant moves away and the any changes do not affect fire safety. Tenants are not permitted to have a cat flap if a door to their property opens onto a communal hallway in a block of flats.

Permission for breeding or selling animals will not be allowed in any Ashford Council Housing property and appropriate tenancy enforcement will be undertaken if this behaviour is identified.

If a tenant wishes to temporarily foster or home a pet for a short period of time, they must speak with their Neighbourhood Housing Officer to discuss and ask for permission, which will always be confirmed in writing.

### **Existing tenants**

The policy does not apply retrospectively for tenants who already own pets. Tenants will not be allowed to home more than the allowed number of pets when existing pets pass away.

If a tenant already has a pet that we are not aware of, we will expect to be notified by the tenant, and they will be asked to sign a pet contract and be expected to look after the pet according to this policy.

### **Pet ownership rules for dogs and cats**

- Tenants may not breed animals or offer for sale any animal at the property. It is recommended that animals are neutered to prevent breeding.
- All dogs must wear a collar with ID tag and lead in any communal area.
- Dog fouling needs to be cleaned up straight away and disposed of appropriately.
- Tenants are responsible for ensuring their garden is secure.
- All cats and dogs must be microchipped, and the microchip number must be provided to Ashford Borough Council.
- All pets should have the appropriate vaccinations and be regularly treated for fleas and worms if appropriate.
- It is recommended that you purchase pet insurance for your cat or dog.
- Cat and dog flaps must not be installed without Councils prior consent.
- Dead pets must be buried or disposed of in a responsible and safe manner.

The following information will be requested on the pet application form:

- Breed, age, and sex of cat or dog.
- What veterinary practice the cat or dog is registered to.
- Who the primary and secondary carer of the pet will be.
- What type of home you live in.
- You will be asked to provide details on how you will provide care, exercise and training for your pet.
- Nominated person and contact details who will care for the pet in an emergency.
- You will need to provide the microchip number for your pet.
- You will be asked to provide insurance details for your pet if you have a policy.

Please see below to see how many cats or dogs can be homed in each type of property.

Property type*	Property size	Amount of pets
All general needs houses	One bed	One dog or one cat
	Two bed +	Up to two dogs and two cats
All general needs flats in a block	Any	One small** dog or one house cat
Temporary accommodation	Any	One small dog or one cat***
Dahlia independent living properties	Any	One small dog or one house cat

\*Small dog would be no bigger than a Highland Terrier

\*\*We cannot give permission for pets in any temporary accommodation that is owned by a third party. We can grant permission for pets in temporary accommodation owned by Ashford Borough Council where the living space is entirely self-contained (i.e. standard self-contained flat, house or maisonette)

### **Assistance dogs**

We will make reasonable adjustments to enable tenants to have an assistance dog on a case-by-case basis.

### **Keeping an XL Bully dog**

If you want to keep your XL Bully dog following the introduction of the new legislation in January 2024, you must apply for a Certificate of Exemption by 31 January 2024 and provide your Neighbourhood Housing Officer with the evidence of this for your house file records.

Useful link: [Apply for a Certificate of Exemption to keep an XL Bully dog - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/apply-for-a-certificate-of-exemption-to-keep-an-xl-bully-dog)  
([www.gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk))

### **Pets you do not need permission for**

Ashford Borough Council tenants do not need permission to keep a reasonable number of caged house birds and small caged animals like hamsters, rabbits etc. However, breeding and selling is not permitted and if tenants are found to not be looking after their home well, we may prevent you from having any caged animals or birds. Any food stored outside for your pets must be in a sealed container to reduce the potential infestation of vermin.

### **Animals we will not give permission for**

- Wild animals
- Livestock or farm animals
- Endangered species or any dogs identified in the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991, or any subsequent legislation. If a tenant is identified as owning a dangerous dog we will liaise with the tenant and the local authority and if the dog is put on the index of exempted dogs (IED) we may allow you to keep the dog in the property as long as you keep to the terms of the exemption certificate.

### **Withdrawing permission to keep a pet**

We may withdraw permission for you to keep your pet if you are in breach of your tenancy agreement or this pet policy. If permission is withdrawn this will be confirmed in writing to you. You will be required to rehome your pet.

### **Nuisance behaviour caused by your pet**

If it is identified that any animal living in a property is causing nuisance behaviour we will record it as an anti-social behaviour complaint. We will ask the tenant to quickly resolve any problems themselves. If a tenant fails to find a suitable resolution to the anti-social behaviour caused by their pet, we will consider withdrawing permission to keep the pet and start enforcement action for breach of tenancy in line with Council's Anti-Social Behaviour Policy.

The following are some examples of what we consider to be nuisance behaviour.

- Fouling in a communal staircase, walkways, courtyards or any communal area or dwelling including tenants own property. Tenants are responsible for cleaning up any mess immediately.
- Injuring or frightening anyone into thinking they might be injured.
- An animal out of control or a danger to other residents.
- Failing to keep a pet on a lead in all communal areas.
- Making a noise that causes or is likely to cause alarm, distress or harassment to others.
- Allowing an animal to cause damage to an Ashford Borough Council property.

- Failing to comply with the terms of any dog control notice or similar notice issues by the relevant authority.

### **Keeping a pet without permission being granted**

If we have evidence that you are keeping a cat or dog without permission, we may consider taking the following actions:

- Request you apply for permission within 14 working days.
- Instigate relevant tenancy enforcement action if you fail to complete an application and/or your application is refused and you do not rehome your pet.
- Serve a Community Protection Warning Notice.
- Serve a Community Protection Notice.
- Instigate legal proceedings.

### **Appeal process**

If you are not granted permission to have a pet or permission is withdrawn, you can request an appeal in writing to the Neighbourhood Services Manager within 14 days of your application being refused. Decision will be made within 14 days of receipt. If an appeal is not upheld, your pet will need to be rehomed within 14 days of receipt of the decision in writing, unless a different timescale is agreed with the Council.

Please write to:

Neighbourhood Services Manager  
Ashford Borough Council  
Tannery Lane  
Ashford  
Kent  
TN23 1PL

Or email: [customer.care@ashford.gov.uk](mailto:customer.care@ashford.gov.uk) marking your email for the attention of the Neighbourhood Services Manager.

### **Legal obligations**

The Animal Welfare Act 2006 makes owners responsible for ensuring their animals welfare needs are met.

These include the need:

- For a suitable environment (place to live)
- For a suitable diet.
- To exhibit normal behaviour patterns.
- To be housed with or apart from other animals (if applicable).
- To be protected from pain, suffering, injury, and disease.
- Minimum age of pet ownership is 16 years.

Anyone who is cruel to an animal or does not provide for its welfare needs may be banned from owning animals, fined up to £20,000 and/or sent to prison.

Dog owners can be prosecuted if their dog attacks a person in their own home or in any public place. This includes any attack on assistance dogs.

