

Pet Policy – Request to Commence Consultation (Housing, Andy Vincent)

Synopsis of report:

- 1. Runnymede Borough Council has commenced a review of its Pet Policy (Appendix A). Work has been undertaken with the Housing Member Working Group to discuss the draft policy on 12 October 2021. Amendments have been made to the policy following that meeting to reflect Members’ views.**
- 2. There are a number of areas where tenants’ attention will be drawn within the consultation, these are: -**
 - **Arrangements for keeping a dog**
 - **Animals where permission must be sought**
 - **Properties where cats can be kept**
 - **Arrangements for Independent Retirement Living**
 - **The actions proposed where there are concerns about how a pet is being kept**
- 3. If approval is given to commence consultation the consultation exercise will commence on 1st March 2022 and run until 15th April 2022. This is to ensure that we are not running too many consultation exercises in parallel.**
- 4. Consultation on the policy will be undertaken utilising the following mechanisms: -**
 - **Two targeted focus group events (ideally online) – one with known pet owners and the other with residents of flat blocks**
 - **Coffee mornings at Independent Retirement Living Schemes**
 - **A multi-agency event on 11th April (Pet Day)**
 - **A tenant/leaseholder newsletter article**

Recommendation(s):

- i. That Members approve the request for Officers to consult on the draft Housing Pet Policy.**
- ii. That Members anticipate receiving the results of the consultation along with the final Policy for approval in June 2022.**

1. Context of report

- 1.1 Runnymede Borough Council Housing Service is conducting a review of its Pet Policy. The purpose of the policy is designed to: -**
 - **Promote responsible pet ownership among RBC’s tenants and leaseholders**
 - **Ensure all pet owners living in RBC properties take responsibility for their animals**
 - **Ensure all pet owners maintain their property and repair any damage caused by their pet**
 - **Ensure that pets are only kept in appropriate RBC properties**

- Protect staff and the wider community from any nuisance as a result of a pet living in a RBC owned property
- Ensure where appropriate tenants are able to benefit from the company of a pet

1.2 The policy was discussed and reviewed by members of the Housing Member Working Group meeting on 12th October 2021. The following additions/alterations were requested to the document, which have now been included: -

- an explanation within the policy that retrospective permission can be sought and granted, provided the owner was responsible.
- A more generous position is articulated within the policy around the keeping of dogs, specifically with reference to a garden.
- Exceptions within the policy exist for assistance dogs. Flexibility over the number of pets is given to the Area Housing Manager – although some guidance on what would be expected by Runnymede Borough Council is given within the policy.
- Advice on leaseholders is provided in the Legal Considerations section of this report.
- Additional information is contained within the policy regarding how concerns over poor pet ownership will be dealt with. Reference is made to the Council's ASB policy and enforcement powers.

2. The Pet Policy

2.1 The policy document once approved will form part of the Housing Service's policy suite. This updated suite of policy documents will promote a review of Runnymede Borough Council's Tenant's Handbook which is a 'tenant friendly' guide to the rights and responsibilities of being a Council tenant. This is planned for 2022/23 and will be incorporated within the Housing Business Centre Plan.

2.2 This document will be reviewed regularly, on a two yearly basis; or sooner if legislation is updated.

2.3 Runnymede Borough Council will seek recognition from the RSPCA in the form of its 'PawPrints' later in 2022 for the work it is doing to support promote responsible pet ownership among its tenants. Recognition is anticipated to be at a Bronze level initially.

3. Policy framework implications

3.1 Development of policies is a priority for the Housing Service as highlighted in the 2021/22 Housing Business Centre Plan.

3.2 The Pet Policy will form part of the Housing Service Policy suite – providing a decision making structure for the Housing Service.

4. Resource implications (where applicable)

- 4.1. Some resources will need to be set aside to support the delivery of the policy.
- 4.2. Specific recommendations will be put to the Housing Committee regarding requirements to support this policy as soon as possible after its approval.

5. **Legal implications**

- 5.1 There are a number of legal requirements which relate to the keeping of a pet which are outlined within the draft Pet Policy. These apply generally and are not specific to tenants or tenants of a social landlord.
- 5.2 The key document which sets out the landlord/tenant relationship is Runnymede Borough Council's Tenancy Agreement. An update to this document will be required to reflect fully the Council's position across all its recently reviewed housing policies and procedures, including the Pets Policy. This is likely to be undertaken and completed in 2023/24.
- 5.3 The Runnymede Borough Council lease for residential properties has been updated to state the following on pets: -

"Not to keep any animals on the premises without the previous consent in writing of the Landlord (such consent not to be unreasonably withheld or delayed) provided that whilst the Landlord is Runnymede Borough Council any such consent shall be given in accordance with its pet policy from time to time."

- 5.4 As what is proposed amounts to a significant change in the housing management service, the consultation will fulfil the statutory requirements to consult under section 105 of the Housing Act 1985. The consultation will extend to all Council's tenants and leaseholders.

6. **Equality implications**

- 6.1 Runnymede Borough Council's Housing Service must ensure that tenants/leaseholders are not dealt with differently due to 'protected characteristics' when a request to keep a pet is received.
- 6.2 An Equality Impact screening assessment on this policy has been carried out and notes made of the potential benefits of pet ownership especially for elderly and vulnerable people.
- 6.3 Managers are responsible for ensuring that this policy is fairly applied, with due regard to a tenant's individual circumstances.

7. **Environmental/Sustainability/Biodiversity implications**

- 7.1 None

8. **Other implications (where applicable)**

- 8.1 The consultation undertaken with tenants on this policy will be undertaken in line with the Council's Consultation Strategy principles.

- A. Consultations should have a clear purpose and start at an appropriate stage
 - B. Consultations should take account of the groups being consulted
 - C. Consultations should be clear and concise
 - D. Consultations should last for a proportionate amount of time
 - E. Responses to consultations should be published in a timely fashion and facilitate scrutiny
- 8.2 Consultation is proposed to commence on 1st March 2022 and end on 15th April 2022 to ensure it does not overlap with other consultation exercises on the Tenant Engagement Strategy and the Draft Recharge Policy.
- 8.3 Specific events within the consultation period will include: -
- Two targeted focus group events (ideally online) – one with known pet owners and the other with residents of flat blocks
 - Coffee mornings at our Independent Retirement Living Schemes
 - A multi-agency event on 11th April (Pet Day)
 - A tenant/leaseholder newsletter article
9. **Conclusions**
- 9.1 Consulting with tenants and leaseholders on the draft Pet Policy will enable Runnymede Borough Council's Housing Service to understand tenants'/leaseholders' views on what pets can be kept and in what circumstances.
- 9.2 These views will be identified to members of the Housing Committee in June 2022.
- 9.3 Once a final position has been established, Runnymede Borough Council will be able to communicate this to its tenants and act to consider permission to keep a pet where it has not previously been given.

(To resolve)

Background papers

Details of the RSPCA PawPrints – recognising the efforts of social landlords to promote responsible pet ownership

[PawPrints | rspca.org.uk](https://www.rspca.org.uk/pawprints)