

RUNNYMEDE BOROUGH COUNCIL

HOUSING BUSINESS CENTRE

Pet Policy

Approved: 2022

Review due: 2024

1. Scope

1.1 Runnymede Borough Council Pet Policy

This policy applies to tenants and leaseholders wishing to keep pets in Runnymede Borough Council properties, regardless of the type of tenancy held.

This policy also includes temporary accommodation secured by the Council in the private sector, where the tenancy is granted by the Council.

This policy has been developed in consultation with Runnymede Borough Council staff, tenants/leaseholders, the RSPCA, and the Dogs Trust. It sets out the policy of the Runnymede Borough Council on keeping pets in Council owned socially rented homes.

2. Context

According to the Pet Food Manufacturers Association 45% of households in the UK have a pet (2013). The increase in the number and variety of pets has implications for both human and animal welfare. Issues including health and safety, noise, smell, nuisance, mistreatment, and cost are best addressed with a clear policy and robust enforcement.

It is recognised that there are many therapeutic benefits to pet ownership, and this has been highlighted due to national lockdowns where loneliness has been exacerbated for people unable to access the community

3. Policy Objectives

The objectives of our Pet Policy are: -

3.1 Our Goals

The objectives of this policy are 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 an RBC owned property
- Ensure where appropriate tenants are able to benefit from the company of a pet

4. Policy Details

4.1 The value of pet ownership

Runnymede Council recognises the benefits of pet ownership, and the enjoyment pets can bring. The Council wishes to encourage responsible pet ownership and will seek to ensure that resources are identified to assist tenants to keep their pet in a responsible manner – which may include subsidising some veterinary services at our discretion and assisting tenants to get their dog microchipped.

RBC will work in partnership with all relevant organisations, such as the Dogs Trust, Cats Protection, RSPCA and PDSA and support tenants where possible to maintain their pet's welfare. This will include referring tenants to independent advice on pet care, advice on pet insurance and a list of local, reputable animal welfare and veterinary organisations.

RBC will also help older people and those living with a terminal illness to arrange care for their pet(s) including promoting services offered by charitable organisations to rehome pets if people can no longer care for them.

4.2 Seeking Permission

Tenants are required to seek permission to keep certain types of domestic pet. Written permission is not required to keep a fish, small caged bird or small domestic rodent. For the purpose of this policy a domestic pet is defined as: -

- Dog (excluding any dogs highlighted by the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991)
- Cat
- Bird (such as a budgie and cockatoo) *
- Fish*
- Small, caged rodent*
- Small non-poisonous caged reptile
- Non-poisonous contained insect or amphibian
- Guinea pig
- Rabbit

Permission will not normally be given for animals not considered domestic pets.

Requests for permission should be made on the 'Application to Have a Pet in a Council Tenancy' form and will require a description and photo, along with details of the species and age of the animal. For dogs, the breed and microchip number (plus confirmation) should also be included. All requests should also include details of any other pets already at the property.

Retrospective permission will be considered to keep a pet if an application is received in line with the above paragraph 'request to keep a pet'.

Once permission is granted tenants must sign an undertaking committing them to responsible ownership and provide a photograph of their pet (if dog or cat) and proof of vaccination and microchip.

4.3 What we will give permission for?

The maximum number of dogs and cats – we would typically consider are as follows. Each case will be considered on an individual basis by the Area Housing Manager: -

1 bed property	1 cat or 1 dog
2 bed property	1 cat or dog
3 bed property	2 of either

Unless the property has a garden or local amenity space (including a park), written permission will not normally be granted to keep a dog, although exceptions may be made for assistance dogs.

Dogs may be kept in Retirement Living properties if the tenant has direct access to the garden. Particular consideration when assessing the suitability of a dog will be given to the setting and client group in accommodation designated for older people.

RBC will not grant permission for a cat unless it can access a garden or if the tenant signs an undertaking that the cat will be a 'house cat' and will not go outside – a similar expectation applies for a 'house rabbit'.

In considering a request for permission to keep a pet, staff will take into account the type of animal and the size and type of accommodation, and any relevant history of pet ownership. Personal circumstances, any complaints of antisocial behaviour and the tenant's ability to take on an additional financial commitment (for example a recent history of regular rent payments + no rent arrears over the last 6 months) may also be considered in considering their suitability for pet ownership.

RBC will also explore with any tenant requesting permission to own a dog who works – what arrangements will be put in place for the dog while they are at work or if/when they are no longer able to care for it. RBC will require a tenant to sign an undertaking in relation to barking and anti-social behaviour. The tenant will be required to rehome a dog if it causes neighbours anti-social behaviour.

The boundary of any garden will be required to be adequate to ensure that a pet will be contained. Where the Council has in place a 3 ft fence or a wire fence this is to mark the boundary and not to contain pets and will not be enhanced due to pet ownership. A tenant may be required to raise the height of the fence or strengthen the base prior to being granted permission in order to ensure that any permitted pet cannot escape from the garden or cause a nuisance to neighbouring properties.

4.4 What happens if I am homeless to my pet?

Runnymede Borough Council will support households seeking assistance from the authority due to homelessness or impending homelessness who are existing pet owners. This support may include: -

- Helping find temporary kennels or lodgings for cats
- Support with rehousing a pet permanently if a pet cannot be kept in the temporary accommodation.

Permission for cats and dogs will not be given to tenants in temporary accommodation as any subsequent offer of settled accommodation may not be suitable for these animals. If permission is granted in exceptional circumstances for an assistance dog, it will be subject to the tenant abiding by the terms of a signed undertaking.

4.5 What we will not give permission for?

Permission will not be granted if the applicant is subject to a ban from keeping animals, the animal requires a licence under the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976, or the dog is of a type prohibited by the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 (unless it has been exempted from the prohibition by a Court Order and the conditions of the exemption are being complied with.)

Under no circumstances are tenants allowed to breed or offer any animal for sale from an RBC owned property. If a tenant is found to be breeding an animal in an RBC owned property, we will withdraw our permission to keep the animal

4.6 Our Tenancy Agreement Conditions

Our tenancy agreement set the following conditions for keeping pets:

- You must not allow any animal kept at the property to cause a nuisance (this includes being noisy) or become a danger to anyone in the local area including contractors and Council employees.
- You must not allow your home to become unhygienic as a result of keeping any pet, animal, or bird.
- You must not allow pets, animals, or birds to damage any Council property and must remove and dispose of all animal mess hygienically.
- You must not feed any birds, squirrels, or other pests either at home, in any shared area or in the local area.

4.7 Specific conditions for keeping a dog

Under this policy the following terms of permission will apply to all dogs:

The dog must be microchipped, and you must provide us with written confirmation that this has been done (a photocopy of the logbook is preferable). You must ensure that your details are kept up to date on the database.

The dog must be kept under proper control at all times when it comes into contact with neighbours, visitors, or their animals. RBC members of staff will be required to visit properties over the period of a tenancy. Dogs must be restrained or kept in a separate room during the visit.

- You must ensure that dogs are kept on a lead at all times in shared areas.

- When outside the property, the dog must wear a collar & tag with your name and address clearly inscribed.
- You must clear up any mess caused by your dog fouling in shared areas, play areas, open spaces, and neighbouring properties. As part of maintaining your own property you must clear up dog faeces from your own garden, failure to do this within a reasonable timescale (same day) will be considered a breach of your tenancy agreement as it will cause nuisance to neighbours.
- You must not leave an animal in your garden unattended when your house is unoccupied.
- You must not leave a dog in an outside kennel or enclosure for extended periods and specifically overnight where it may cause noise nuisance to neighbouring properties.
- Any damage to Council property such as internal woodwork and doors must be rectified immediately. Dog must not be allowed to scratch any internal or external doors.
- You must not keep any dog as described in section 1 of the Dangerous Dog Act 1991 (unless it has been exempted from the prohibition by a Court Order and the conditions of the exemption are being complied with.)
- You must not keep a dog for breeding or fighting purposes.

Permission to keep a pet may be withdrawn at any time if a tenant breaches a relevant condition of their tenancy agreement or if they do not comply with the specific terms of permission for keeping a dog. If the pet is not rehomed, further action may be taken (see 7 below).

4.8 Promoting responsible pet ownership

We will work with our partners in providing quality information on responsible pet ownership.

We will promote responsible pet ownership through community engagement and education, we will also set aside financial resources to encourage the microchipping of dogs and the neutering of cats.

4.9 Cat flaps

Tenants living in houses and bungalows can, at their own expense, choose to install a cat flap provided they have received permission from RBC, this is done professionally and does not reduce the security of the door. Cat flaps can only be installed at the rear of a property. Dog flaps are not permitted. If a door is replaced as part of our repairs and maintenance service, the council will charge to install a cat flap. Tenants are not required to pay for a replacement door when vacating the property after the first 5 years of installation.

4.10 Returning a pet to a tenant/leaseholder

Should any Runnymede Borough Council team be required to return a pet to its owner for any reason, any costs associated with returning a pet must be paid prior to receipt plus any nightly charge for accommodation (see RBC's Recharge Policy). Failure to pay the due charges and collect the animal within 10 days will result in the Council arranging for it to be rehomed.

4.11 Pets at the end of a tenancy

If for any reason the tenant vacates a property, they are expected to take any pets with them. This includes evictions.

4.12 Pest control

Tenants are responsible for ensuring that their pets and property are free from fleas, ticks or other pests that could be transferred onto carpets or furnishings within the home. Any infestation of fleas or other pests will be the tenant's responsibility to treat. RBC is responsible for controlling pests in communal areas of buildings such as flat blocks and Independent Retirement Living. If treatments are required in communal areas caused by a tenant's pet, we will recharge residents for the cost of the treatment.

5.0 Enforcement of this policy

We will take appropriate steps, in conjunction with our partners and relevant agencies, to enforce this policy. Action will be taken in line with our Anti-Social Behaviour Policy. Whether or not permission has been given, if staff become aware that pets are causing a nuisance, hazard, or danger, or are neglected and we have concerns about their welfare we will take reasonable and proportionate action which could include the following:

- Withdrawal of permission to keep the pet, if previously given, or written clarification that permission cannot be given.
- Reporting concerns to the RSPCA or other agencies.
- Written/final written warning of breach of tenancy agreement.
- Liaison with Surrey Police, potentially leading to police action.
- Acceptable Behaviour/Animal Behaviour Contract.
- Community Protection Warning/Notice.
- Application for an Injunction to prevent Nuisance and Annoyance.
- Possession proceedings which could result in demotion or eviction.

Without prejudice to any other action we may take, permission to keep a pet may be withdrawn at any time if the terms of permission are not complied with or the tenant breaches a condition of their tenancy agreement.

Permission will also be withdrawn following conviction of an offence under animal welfare legislation.

6. Consultation and communication

Runnymede Council tenants and Leaseholders, the Dogs Trust, the RSPCA, and a range of Council staff, including Legal and Environmental Health colleagues, were consulted in the preparation of this policy.

7. Monitoring and performance management

This policy was approved.....

We will consult staff and residents about the operation of our policy and procedures. We aim to review this policy in 2 years to ensure that it reflects current legislation and the latest examples of best practice.

8. Legislation and Regulation

The legislation and guidance listed below has been taken into consideration when formulating this policy and will be taken into account in implementation:

- The Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976 specifies that a licence is needed to keep some animals considered to be wild, dangerous, or exotic.
- Housing Act 1985, Schedule 2 (Ground 2 – ‘nuisance or annoyance’ ground for possession)
- Environmental Protection Act 1990 – relates specifically in the case of dogs and other animals as to what constitutes statutory noise nuisance. If an animal is causing a statutory noise nuisance, enforcement action can be taken by the local authority to control the behaviour.
- Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 - it is unlawful to let a dog be dangerously out of control. Under the Act, the following types of dogs are banned (unless they have been exempted from the prohibition by a Court Order): Pit Bull Terrier, Japanese Tosa, Dogo Argentino and Fila Brasileiro.
- Control of Dogs Order 1992 – requires that a dog in a public place wears a collar identifying the name and address of its owner, local authority to enforce.

- Crime and Disorder Act 1998 – remains in force, requires statutory agencies to work together to address anti-social behaviour impacting their geographical area, including the formulating, and implementing of strategies for its reduction.
- Animal Welfare Act 2006 - places a duty of care on the pet owner to ensure they take reasonable steps to meet the welfare needs of their animals to the extent required by good practice. This includes somewhere suitable for their pet to live. The Act also makes it is an offence to cause any unnecessary suffering to any domestic or captive animal.
- Equalities Act 2010 – protects people with certain ‘characteristics’ including Race, Gender and Disability from discrimination, in employment, provision of services and wider society. The Public Sector Equality Duty requires public authorities in exercising their functions to eliminate discrimination; promote equality of opportunity and foster good relations between different people.
- Human Rights Act 1998, gives effect to the European Convention on Human Rights directly in UK law, including Article 8 rights to respect for private and family life, home, and correspondence.
- The RSPCA states that restrictions on pet ownership in tenancy agreements and pet policies are appropriate and will not infringe human rights where they are needed to ensure good animal welfare, avoid anti-social behaviour and nuisance to other tenants and/or protect the landlord’s premises from danger. (Housing: A Guide to Good Practice, RSPCA, 2012)
- The Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 amends the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991, making it unlawful to let a dog be dangerously out of control in any public or private place. The Act also contains the new enforcement powers including Community Protection Warnings/Notices and Anti-Social Behaviour Injunctions which are key tools for tackling nuisance.

9. Equalities Implications

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.

Managers are responsible for ensuring that this policy is fairly applied, with due regard to a tenant’s individual circumstances.

10. Complaints

Requiring residents to seek permission before homing a pet helps the Council carry out its landlord role effectively and proactively. It assists in dealing with complaints about nuisance, responding to cases of missing pets and in strategic emergency planning.

RBC will deal with complaints and the concerns of both pet owners and neighbours regarding nuisance animals, welfare, health, or cruelty issues through its anti-social behaviour policy/procedure. This will ensure that parties are kept informed of progress with their complaint and can see actions and outcomes relating to their concerns through their Housing Online account

This approach will also enable RBC to test customer satisfaction with how each complaint has been handled. Capturing feedback will enable us to continue to develop our approach to ensure it is as effective as possible.

11. Related Strategies and Documents

This policy links to and should be read in conjunction with the following policies and strategies:

- Corporate Plan 2016 – 2020
- Housing Strategy 2021-2026
- Tenancy Management Policy
- Tenancy Agreement

Approval

Version No	
Approved By	
Approval Date	
Effective from	
Date of next review	
Policy owner	
Policy author	
Consultation	
EIA	
DPIA	

Version Control

Date	Author	Version	Details of Review