

Pet Policy – Approval (Housing, Andy Vincent)

Synopsis of report:

A draft Housing Pet Policy was discussed at the Housing and Enabling Member Working Party on 12 October 2021 – the working party made the following recommendations: -

Permission was granted by the Runnymede Borough Council Housing Committee on 12 January 2022 to take the policy out to tenant/leaseholder consultation.

The consultation period ended on 26th April 2022; the results of the consultation are summarised in section 2 of the report – with the full results attached at appendix B.

Amendments to the policy have been made following the tenant consultation – these are highlighted in section 2.3 of the report.

Once approval for the policy has been given, the Housing Service will work on an associated procedure, which will also include clear enforcement tools and will seek recognition for its approach to pets from the RSPCA.

Recommendation:

- 1. That members approve the Housing Pet Policy (Appendix A)**

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: -

- 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

- 1.2 Following the review of the Pet Policy Runnymede Borough Council will seek recognition for its approach from the RSPCA. Runnymede Borough Council will then be able to develop its approach in future years to achieve higher levels of recognition (see background papers on the RSCPA Paws Awards).

2. Consultation Results

- 2.1 The consultation exercise elicited 108 survey responses.

2.2 These can be summarised as supporting the proposed approach within the policy to assessing whether a tenant would be able to keep a pet; for example, the Council would consider when permission was sought to keep a pet the following items (and more): -

1. History of pets
2. Other pets in the household
3. Type of property
4. Size of property

2.3 There were additional criteria suggested that the Council should consider when assessing whether a tenant is suitable to keep a pet; these include: -

- Mental health of the tenant
- Ensure the pet gets training
- Kids and age of kids
- The age of the tenant

2.4 Independent Retirement Living

Tenants were asked about whether pets could be kept within our Independent Retirement Living accommodation. 55.55% were in favour of allowing tenants to keep a pet(s), although there are reservations; these included: -

- Tenants should have a guarantor in place for the pet should they pass away or go into hospital
- Exercise requirements and ability to meet those needs, i.e. paying for a dog walker if they have mobility issues
- Emotional attachment needs to be considered
- If they already own a pet before they move to IRL scheme that's different but dogs bark and that's not fair. Cats no problem.
- Tenants could volunteer to walk the dogs of elderly people. Organise regular dog visits either from other tenants or outside organisations

2.5 Temporary Accommodation

The proposed approach within the policy to supporting tenants needing temporary accommodation with pets to house them elsewhere temporarily was also supported by the consultees – 60% were in favour.

2.6 The consultation exercise has prompted the following changes to the policy: -

1. Only assistance dogs will be considered for Independent Retirement Living
2. Within the agreement to keep a pet – discussion of who would look after a pet if the tenant was unable to do so will be included
3. The agreement will also include a section to encourage dogs to be trained
4. Where permission has been granted to keep a dog – this arrangement will be checked annually.
5. Financial support to house a pet while in temporary accommodation

2.7 These changes to the policy are provided in more detail in section 8.4.

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

- 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 Housing 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 Housing Pet 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 The consultation undertaken with tenants and leaseholders on this policy meets the Council's obligations under section 105 of the Housing Act 1985 to consult widely with its tenants and leaseholders when there is a significant change in the housing management service.

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 Equalities Screening Form has been completed to support this request for policy approval.

7. Environmental/Sustainability/Biodiversity implications

7.1 None

8. Other implications (where applicable)

8.1 The consultation undertaken with tenants and leaseholders on this policy was 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 commenced on 1st March 2022 and ended on 26th April 2022

8.3 Specific events within the consultation period included: -

- Two targeted focus group events – 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

8.4 The following additions have been made to the policy following the consultation:-

- 1) Under section 5.4 Seeking approval – additions have been made to the following paragraph

Once permission is granted tenants must sign an undertaking committing them to responsible ownership, ensuring their pet receives exercise and training in the case of dogs and identifies arrangements should they be under able to keep their pet due to ill health etc.

- 2) Under section 6.0 What we will give permission for – the following additions have been made (highlighted in italics – also the enclosed paragraphs are not in the order they are included within the policy).

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 + *the Independent Retirement Living Scheme manager if the resident lives in our older persons accommodation: -*

Only assistance and sensory dogs may be kept in Retirement Living with permission from RBC.

Cats living in Independent Retirement Living will be expected to be a 'house cat'. Residents will be expected to agree to this when signing their undertaking.

- 3) Under section 7.1 What happens to my pet if I am homeless – an addition has been made to that section: -

Contributing to the costs of lodgings during the homeless 'relief duty'

This responds to the Homelessness Code of Guidance, which says:

17.63 Households with pets *Housing authorities will need to be sensitive to the importance of pets to some applicants, particularly elderly people and rough sleepers who may rely on pets for companionship. Although it will not always be possible to make provision for pets, the Secretary of State recommends that housing authorities give careful consideration to this aspect when making provision for applicants who wish to retain their pet.*

- 4) Under section 10.4 Specific conditions for keeping a dog – an addition has been made to that section: -

Runnymede Borough Council will conduct an annual check of all arrangements to keep a dog(s) where permission has been granted by the Council.

9. Conclusions

- 9.1 Runnymede Borough Council's Housing Service has had considerable input into its Pet Policy. This has led to a number of changes to the policy. The policy is considerably improved as a result of the input.
- 9.2 The next steps once the policy has been approved is to inform tenants and leaseholders as to the amended requirements included within the new Pet Policy to keep a pet in a Council owned property or block. To prepare a procedure to deal with requests from tenants to keep a pet, to ensure all requests are dealt with consistently; and to encourage existing pet owners where they do not have permission to keep a pet to seek permission.
- 9.3 The Council will also commence an annual check of all tenants who have permission to keep a dog to ensure those arrangements are working effectively.

(To resolve)

Background papers

Housing Pet Policy – Request to Commence Consultation from the 12th January 2022 Housing Committee meeting (pages 78-91).
[\(Public Pack\)Agenda Document for Housing Committee, 12/01/2022 19:30 \(runnymede.gov.uk\)](#)

RSPCA Paws Awards
[PawPrints | rspca.org.uk](#)

Homelessness Code of Guidance
[Homelessness code of guidance for local authorities - Guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)