

Midlands Rural Housing

Pet Policy Statement & Procedure

July 2023

This policy is implemented by Midlands Rural Housing on behalf of four independent partner associations: Leicestershire Rural Housing Association, Northamptonshire Rural Housing Association, Peak District Rural Housing Association and Warwickshire Rural Housing Association. Midlands Rural Housing provides the full range of housing and management services for these four associations in line with a procedure agreement.

	Pet Policy Statement & Procedure
Version date	July 2023
Author Title & Issuing Department	Edward Massey Housing Services Manager
Target Audience	Colleagues with-in the Communities, Property Services & Customer Experience Teams. Residents.

Review Date	July 2026
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Outcomes for Customers	<p>Residents</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will understand when and what type of pet they may keep • Will understand when they must request permission to keep a pet • Will understand their responsibilities as a pet owner
Training Provision	The Housing Services Manager, will be responsible for cascading the policy to their team.
Links to the Business Plan	<p>Communities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure the highest standards of safe working practices, ensuring our homes and communities are safe places to live and work. • Review service delivery structures and accountabilities in response to the Social Housing White Paper.

1. Introduction

1.1. We want residents to own and enjoy pets in their homes. We acknowledge that keeping a pet can have a significant positive impact on their owner's physical and mental health, and can be a very rewarding and beneficial experience. Benefits can include companionship, reducing isolation and improvements to both physical and mental wellbeing.

1.2. This policy sets out our approach to managing pet ownership and the standards we expect of pet owners. Our policy aims for a consistent, and fair approach to pet ownership and outlines our approach to dealing with any nuisance caused by customers and their pets as well as any related issues like reports of neglect or maltreatment.

1.3. There has been an increase in pet ownership since the increase in home working. This needs to be balanced with the potential for nuisance to other residents if pet owners are not responsible in the way they care for their pet and manage their pet's behaviour.

2. Definitions and Scope

2.1. This policy applies to all households living in our general needs and shared ownership homes.

2.2. This policy should be read in conjunction with our Anti-Social Behaviour Policy, Tenancy Policies, and our Complaints Policy.

2.3. Where residents require guide dogs, assistance dogs or animals for medical conditions such as deafness or impaired vision, these animals will be exempt from this policy. We may ask that evidence is provided from a professional body to support the request for permission to keep a pet.

3. Specifics of the Policy

3.1. Permitted and Non permitted Animals

The Association will consider granting permission for the following animals:

- Dog
- Cat
- Small birds
- Fish
- Small caged animals such as guinea pigs, rabbits and hamsters
- Small caged non-poisonous reptiles, insect or amphibian

The Association will under no circumstances permit the following animals in any of our properties or on land that we own for example communal green space:

- Farm animals including sheep, goats, pigs, cattle, horses, ducks, chickens and cockerels
- Animals registered under the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976 including some poisonous snakes, spiders and monkeys.
- Dogs specified in the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 including Pit Bull Terriers,
- Japanese Tosa, Dogo Argentino and Fila Brasileiro
- Any other animal legally prohibited to be kept as pets

3.2. If a customer wants to keep any additional pets, they must seek our permission in writing. Decisions will be made in conjunction with property type and will be limited to a maximum of two dogs and two cats per property. Decision making will rest with Housing Officers.

3.3. Pets in Flats

3.3.1. Pets that can be reasonably kept in a flat, i.e. they stay indoors such as caged birds, house cat etc will be permitted. Permission will in most instances, not be given for animals that leave the home such as cats and dogs unless they have their own private access and private garden.

3.3.2. At the time this policy previously came into operation, it was agreed that where there were existing pets these will be permitted to stay to see out their natural life but they will not be allowed to be replaced.

3.4. Tenancy and Leasehold

3.4.1. In addition to this policy the existing tenancy agreement or lease/covenant will set out if the customer can keep a pet in the property.

3.5. Affordability

3.5.1. Responsible pet ownership can require significant financial resources and affordability should be considered when making a decision to allow a pet. This should be within the context of family income/expenditure and debt/rent arrears and be based on detailed analysis. Permission for a pet may be refused or revoked if a customer is in arrears as paying the rent and service charges is a priority.

3.6. Breeding

3.6.1. Under no circumstances will permission be given to breed animals or offer any animal for sale from a Rural property if this is done as a business.

3.7. Assistance Pets

3.7.1. Assistance dogs will be permitted as they are not classified as pets under legislation.

3.7.2. Assistance dogs are those specially trained to help people with a disability such as sight impairment and hearing loss, mobility problems, autism etc.

3.7.3. If pet ownership has been identified as a therapy in supporting other disabilities or mental health issues this will be considered in the decision for permitting a pet. Appropriate evidence of the need will be required.

3.7.4. Enforcement action will be undertaken, in dealing with any breaches of the above unless the dog has been exempted from the prohibition and the terms of the exemption are fully complied with, including being registered on the Index of Exempted dogs.

3.8. Pet Owner Responsibilities

3.8.1. We expect all pet owners to behave responsibly by upholding the following standards:

(1) All pets must be cared for responsibly, and in line with Section 9 (2) of the Animal Welfare Act 2006:

(2) For the purposes of this Act, an animal's needs shall be taken to include—

(a) its need for a suitable environment,

(b) its need for a suitable diet,

(c) its need to be able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns,

(d) any need it has to be housed with, or apart from, other animals, and

(e) its need to be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease.

- All pets must be kept under proper control and not cause a nuisance to other households. This includes dogs being kept on a lead in communal areas, not entering play areas and being under control including when employees or contractors attend a property.

- No fouling in communal areas or balconies. Where fouling has occurred, the responsible owners must clean up immediately.

- Owners must actively seek to prevent unpleasant odours being emitted from their property due to their pet(s).

- If a pet is excessively noisy, a veterinary surgeon should be consulted for advice, as this could be a symptom of behavioural problems which will also need investigation.

- Animals must not damage any property, including communal parts of the building and neighbouring properties. Owners may be recharged for any repairs which are needed as a result of such damage.

- All dogs over the age of eight weeks must be microchipped and wear a collar and tag in public.

- Animals must not be kept for the purposes of breeding or sale.

- Owners must have suitable arrangements in place for looking after their pet during periods of absence. For example, if you go away for a weekend or a holiday you should either place your pet in a cattery or kennels or arrange for someone to visit daily.

- Cat or dog flaps (or similar devices) must not be installed without our prior consent as these can compromise the fire safety of a property. And they are not permitted on doors that open onto shared areas.

- In situations where a resident is temporarily looking after a pet for a friend or family member, all the above requirements apply. They also apply if you have friends or family visiting your home with their pet.
- 3.8.2. If the pet passes away, it must be buried or disposed of in a responsible and safe manner and cannot be buried in communal gardens.
- 3.8.3. We suggest that pet owners consider taking out pet insurance to help meet costs should their pet need medical attention.

3.9. Application and approval

- 3.9.1. A pet request form will be completed by the customer and will be assessed by the housing team.

- 3.9.2. We retain the right to withdraw permission where the pet has caused nuisance, or we believe the owner to be showing signs of animal cruelty or neglect.

4. Implementation

4.1. Nuisance, neglect or concern

- 4.1.1. We will work with households to address pet-related issues or any circumstances affecting the owner which have led to such issues. This may include referrals to specialist animal welfare organizations for information, advice, and guidance.

- 4.1.2. Where a pet owner fails to engage with such efforts, or if the level of nuisance, cruelty or neglect is significant, we will consider further action. This may include making a referral to the local authority and/or police, requesting the rehoming of the animal, or in some cases where there is substantial evidence of nuisance, seeking possession of the property or taking injunctive proceedings. Where a decision has been made to rehome an animal, we will allow this to take place within what we consider a reasonable timeframe.

- 4.1.3. It is illegal for a pet owner to allow their dog to be dangerously out of control in a public place. This includes any incidents where injury occurs or there is a fear that an injury might occur. We will report all such incidents to the police, and this may result in sanctions or criminal prosecution.

- 4.1.4. We will report any complaint of animal cruelty to the RSPCA and will report any stray animals to the relevant local authority.

4.1.5. We will investigate all issues relating to nuisance or anti-social behaviour in line with our Anti-Social Behaviour Policy. Enforcement action will be taken in line with the ASB policy, based on evidence and considering reasonableness and proportionality.

4.2. Enforcement

4.2.1. If we consider the nuisance to be serious or persistent then appropriate enforcement action can be taken against the pet owner. This may involve the following:

- Contacting the local Environmental Health Department to take action under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 (e.g., incidents involving noise, fouling and smells).
- Contacting the Local Authority Dog Warden Service who have responsibility to ensure animal health and welfare.
- Contacting the Police if the pet is believed to be dangerous and/ or covered under the Dangerous Dogs Act.
- Contacting the RSPCA or RSBP if the pet is being ill-treated or suffering.
- Charging customers where pets have caused damage to emh property.
- Seeking an injunction to prevent customers from keeping a pet in a particular property or taking pets to specific areas. This will be based on evidence and on legal advice, on a case-by-case basis.
- Seeking possession of a customer's home for serious and persistent breaches of their tenancy or lease.

5. Responsibilities

5.1. This policy will be reviewed every 3 years to ensure compliance with national best practice and legislation. This review may take place earlier if a significant change in legislation or policy occurs.

6. Equality of access

6.1 It is essential that the Pet Policy should be equally accessible to our customers. We will ensure that the policy is provided in easy-to-read formats and provide customers access to appropriate support which will include:

- translation of communications into another language
- translation of communications into braille
- use of Language Line interpretation service
- communicating with the customer's advocate, where permission has been granted.

7. Appeal

If your application to keep a pet has been refused, and you wish to appeal, please tell us your reasons and this will be reviewed within 10 working days by the Housing Services Manager.

Associated Documents

ASB procedures

Allocation policy