

Resettlement from Temporary Accommodation with pets

Final Decision-Maker	CHE
Lead Head of Service	John Littlemore
Lead Officer and Report Author	Hannah Gaston
Classification	Public
Wards affected	All

Executive Summary

To ensure that those who need to access Temporary Accommodation [TA] (for both statutory and discretionary accommodation) with pets are able to seek an appropriate resettlement option for their household. This will mean that the household are able to refuse their first offer of accommodation if they do not feel it is appropriate for their pet, or they cannot take their pet, without the worry of being removed from the housing register or any support withdrawn from the Housing Services team.

Purpose of Report

To request the Committee's approval to adopt a pilot approach assisting households with pets to move into settled accommodation.

This report makes the following recommendations to this Committee:

1. That the CHE Committee adopts the approach set out in Paragraph 3.2 of this report.

Timetable

Meeting	Date
CHE Committee (please state)	25 th August 2020
Council	

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1. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	<p>The four Strategic Plan objectives are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homes and Communities • We do not expect the recommendations will by themselves materially affect achievement of corporate priorities. However, they will support the Council’s overall achievement of its aims as set out in section 3 [preferred alternative]. 	Head of Housing & Community Services
Cross Cutting Objectives	<p>Deprivation and Social Mobility is Improved</p> <p>The report recommendation(s) supports the achievement(s) of the deprivation and social mobility cross cutting objectives by ensuring those who are homeless have access to appropriate accommodation.</p>	Head of Housing & Community Services
Risk Management	<p>The risk of undertaking these recommendations are fairly limited and should not have a significant impact on our move on from temporary accommodation.</p>	Head of Housing & Community Services
Financial	<p>The proposals set out in the recommendation are all within already approved budgetary headings and so need no new funding for implementation.</p>	[Section 151 Officer & Finance Team]
Staffing	<p>We will deliver the recommendations with our current staffing.</p>	Head of Housing & Community Services
Legal	<p>Acting on the recommendations is within the Council’s powers as set out in Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and associated code of guidance.</p>	[Legal Team]

Privacy and Data Protection	Accepting the recommendations will increase the volume of data held by the Council. We will hold that data in line with our retention schedules.	Policy and Information Team
Equalities	An Equalities Impact Assessment was undertaken as part of the development of the Pets in Accommodation policy in 2018	Equalities and Corporate Policy Officer
Public Health	We recognise that the recommendations will likely have a positive impact on the mental wellbeing of individuals with pets.	Senior Public Health Officer
Crime and Disorder	The recommendation will have a neutral impact on Crime and Disorder. The Community Protection Team have been consulted and mitigation has been proposed	Head of Housing & Community Services
Procurement	No procurement processes need to be undertaken for this change in practise.	Head of Housing & Community Services

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 2.1 MBC has taken an innovative and flexible approach to individuals who find themselves homeless and in need of accommodation, but still have a household pet. We have developed a policy which enables the homeless household to be placed into our own temporary accommodation with their pet whilst waiting for an appropriate move on option to become available.
- 2.2 This policy has been a success and we have accommodated many individuals in our own stock through a statutory or a discretionary duty including many rough sleepers with no priority need. Currently we are accommodating approximately six to seven cats and dogs, across a number of households and we have one former rough sleeper living in shared accommodation with a dog.
- 2.3 Even though we have developed our own pet policy this does still bring challenges in terms of moving households on from TA and finding appropriate accommodation. Many landlords including registered social housing providers and private landlords refuse to take tenants with animals. This can often lead to a household being offered a property which is not suitable for pets or with a landlord who will not accept them.
- 2.4 This approach is often applied to flat and apartment accommodation and as the majority of the accommodation available to single person households is this type of housing, this affects this client group disproportionately. Some

housing providers, such as West Kent Housing are adopting a more flexible approach and it is our aim to encourage more housing providers to review their tenancy conditions to make them more pet friendly.

Whilst we pursue this overarching aim, it is proposed to operate a pilot programme in order to address the concerns that pet owning households may have to separate from existing pets. Our current approach with those households who we owe a duty to secure accommodation under the Homelessness legislation is to make one offer of suitable accommodation. In statutory terms pets are not considered as part of the household, which could mean that accommodation with a 'no pet' rule would be deemed to be suitable for the purpose of ending the duty to secure accommodation.

3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

- 3.1 The current approach is compliant with the legislation and the Council could decide to continue with our current process of only offering one suitable option for move on from temporary accommodation, thereby, people with pets are not able to decline an offer as unsuitable even if they are not able to take their pet. However, this is not proposed as this approach is not in the spirit of working with individuals who have pets as a support or for therapeutic reasons.
- 3.2 Operate a 12 month pilot for those who move into TA with a pet (so do not obtain a pet whilst in TA) have an option to decline the first offer of accommodation if they feel it is not suitable for a pet or they cannot take the pet with them due to the landlord's condition. We would expect the next offer to be accepted to ensure there is still a throughput of households through our TA stock which can then be offered to other homeless households. Staff would be mindful of the pet situation and try to ensure that an appropriate offer is made.
- 3.3 Allow those with pets to stay within the TA and refuse any number of offers until they find suitable move on property. This could cause a bottleneck of individuals moving out from TA and in turn cause a financial burden to MBC who potentially have to seek private nightly paid providers to accommodate other households as they approach.

4. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 The preferred option is 3.2. as this approach would enable those who move into TA with their pets to be able to refuse their first offer of accommodation as unsuitable but it not affect the homelessness duty to secure housing through the Housing Register or within the private rented market, and it would not lead to a cessation of our support. This options also strikes a fair balance between supporting those households with pets and enabling the Council to manage the use of temporary accommodation, so as to avoid having to use expensive and less desirable accommodation for homeless families.

- 4.2 This recommendation ensures the Council is supportive of an individual's right to have a pet, which can be very emotionally valuable to an individual (especially to rough sleepers). It also enables there to be a continued flow through our TA stock and shouldn't become a burden on our budget given the financial pressures we all face now. A further report will be provided to the CHE Committee after the initial 12 month pilot period.
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5. RISK

- 5.1 The risks associated with this proposal, including the risks if the Council does not act as recommended, have been considered in line with the Council's Risk Management Framework and contained within the body of the report. We are satisfied that the risks associated are within the Council's risk appetite and will be managed as per the Policy.

6. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

- 6.1 The issues of pets within our TA has been on-going for some time and we have developed a "Pets in Accommodation" policy in 2018 – which has been in operation since that time.
- 6.2 More recently, the CHE Committee was asked by a member of the public on 20th June 2020 about the ability for households to decline an offer if they felt it wasn't suitable for their pet. This report is a response to those specific questions.
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7. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

- 7.1 If the recommendations are approved, then we will ensure these new practises will be implemented within our policies and across the housing team.
- 7.2 It will also be important for those who have pets to understand this option and will form part of an up-dated pet policy and contract.
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8. REPORT APPENDICES

- Appendix 1: Pet Policy – 2018
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