

Pets Within Temporary Accommodation

Final Decision-Maker	Communities, Housing & Environment Committee
Lead Head of Service/Lead Director	John Littlemore Head of Housing & Community Services
Lead Officer and Report Author	Rebecca Astin
Classification	Public
Wards affected	All

Executive Summary

Maidstone Borough Council recognises the benefits of enabling homeless applicants to be able to keep their pets with them whilst being housed in accommodation under the Homelessness legislation.

This report outlines a proposal to create a policy that allows (where possible) pets to reside with the families whilst in temporary accommodation. Acknowledging the statutory limitations if the housing management team are unable to find suitable accommodation for households that present with a pet.

This report makes the following recommendations to this Committee:

1. That the Communities, Housing & Environment Committee approve the Pet Policy 2018 and agreement attached as Appendix A and B of this report.

Timetable

Meeting	Date
Communities, Housing & Environment Committee	17 th July 2018

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Various studies have noted the importance and benefits of households who find themselves homeless of being able to retain their pets with them when they are homeless or threatened with homelessness.
- 1.2 Pets often provide companionship for many of the Council's applicants, particular those who have experienced periods of street homelessness who may also keep their pets to provide a degree of safety. These households and those with children often see their pets as an intrinsic part of the family, and therefore want to include them as part of their homeless application.
- 1.3 Unfortunately a number of housing providers, including some housing associations, exclude pets from certain types of accommodation e.g. flatted housing. In addition when the Council has to use emergency accommodation it is officers' experience that the proprietor is unlikely to permit pets.
- 1.4 Whilst the Homelessness Code of Guidance encourages pets to be accommodated with the household, the Code acknowledges that pets are not considered in law to be part of the household for the purpose of providing accommodation. This means that the inclusion of the pet is not a matter that is considered as to whether the offer of accommodation is suitable. The exception being where the pet provides a service e.g. a registered guide dog or medical condition alerting dog.
- 1.5 The separation of pet and owner can be a traumatic experience for the household. In addition if pets are not permitted at the accommodation the homeless households needs to make alternative arrangements. Sometimes friends or relatives can assist but where this cannot be achieved households have to make alternative arrangements for the pet. This can have financial impact on the income of the household in addition to the stress caused by being parted from their pet.
- 1.6 With the advent of the Council acquiring temporary accommodation in its ownership the opportunity has arisen to adopt a more considerate approach to the issue. To enable the Council to agree the roles and responsibilities with households being accommodated with their pets a set of principles is attached in the form of a policy document for applicants together with an agreement for both parties to sign. These are attached as appendices to the report.

2. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

- 2.1 Option 1. The Council could choose not to have a policy and exclude all pets from their temporary accommodation but to do so would have a detrimental

effect on households being separated from their pets. This blanket approach is not recommended as this causes unnecessary stress and possible financial burden.

- 2.2 Option 2. The Council could permit pets in property where it is suitable for pets to be kept. In order for this to be permitted a policy covering the roles and responsibilities is suggested to ensure that all parties are clear as to what is expected of them. This could be enshrined within an agreement between the household and the Council to assist with providing clarity and if necessary enforcement of the occupation conditions.

3. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 The preferred option is Option 2 as this will enable the Council to adopt a more humane approach to accommodating households with their pets whilst reducing the risk of nuisance or damage from pets being housed with the household.

4. RISK

- 4.1 There is a risk of increase nuisance or annoyance to neighbouring properties; and the potential for damage to the property owned by the Council. These risks will be mitigated through the sign-up procedure that will ensure the applicant is aware of their responsibilities and through the regular contact as part of the management of the temporary accommodation.

5. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

- 5.1 Once adopted, the policy will be implemented with immediate effect and applied to those properties as deemed suitable depending on the type of property and pet to be accommodated.

6. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">We do not expect the recommendations will by themselves materially affect achievement of corporate priorities.	

Risk Management	Low risk and impact	Head of Housing and Community Services
Financial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The proposals set out in the recommendation are all within already approved budgetary headings and so need no new funding for implementation. 	Head of Housing and Community Services
Staffing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We will deliver the recommendations with our current staffing. 	Head of Housing and Community Services
Legal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acting on the recommendations is within the Council's powers as set out within the homelessness legislation. 	Head of Housing and Community Services
Privacy and Data Protection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We do not expect the recommendations will by themselves materially affect this matter 	Head of Housing & Community Services
Equalities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The recommendations do not propose a change in service therefore will not require an equalities impact assessment 	Head of Housing & Community Services
Crime and Disorder	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The recommendation will have a negative impact on Crime and Disorder. The Community Safety Team have been consulted and mitigation has been proposed 	Head of Housing & Community Services

Procurement	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Not applicable	Head of Housing & Community Services
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7. REPORT APPENDICES

The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:

- Appendix A: Pets in Temporary Accommodation Policy
- Appendix B: Pets in Temporary Accommodation Agreement

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a969da940f0b67aa5087b93/Homelessness_code_of_guidance.pdf