

**Resettlement from Temporary Accommodation with pets – Update**

<b>Final Decision-Maker</b>	CHE
<b>Lead Head of Service</b>	John Littlemore, Head of Housing, Communities and Environment
<b>Lead Officer and Report Author</b>	Hannah Gaston, Housing Inclusion Manager
<b>Classification</b>	Public
<b>Wards affected</b>	All

**Executive Summary**

To review the impact of the pilot “pets policy” scheme for those living in Temporary Accommodation (both statutory and discretionary), which has taken place over the preceding twelve months.

**Purpose of Report**

Decision

**This report makes the following recommendations to this Committee:**

1. That the Committee approves the policy, as set out in appendix 1 to the report, to adopt as a permanent policy; and
2. That the Committee gives consideration to naming the policy the “John Chadwick Pet Policy”.

**Timetable**

<b>Meeting</b>	<b>Date</b>
Committee CHE	5 October 2021

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## 1. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
<b>Impact on Corporate Priorities</b>	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 and Community Services
<b>Cross Cutting Objectives</b>	Deprivation and Social Mobility is Improved  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.	Head of Housing and Community Services
<b>Risk Management</b>	The risk of undertaking these recommendations are fairly limited and should not have a significant impact on our move on from temporary accommodation.	Head of Housing and Community Services
<b>Financial</b>	The proposals set out in the recommendation are all within already approved budgetary headings and so need no new funding for implementation.	Director of Finance and Business Improvement
<b>Staffing</b>	We will deliver the recommendations with our current staffing compliment.	Head of Housing and Community Services
<b>Legal</b>	Acting on the recommendations is within the Council's powers as set out in Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and associated code of guidance.	Team Leader (Contentious)
<b>Privacy and Data Protection</b>	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

<b>Equalities</b>	An Equalities Impact Assessment was undertaken as part of the development of the Pets in Accommodation policy in 2018.	Equalities and Communities Officer
<b>Public Health</b>	We recognise that the recommendations will likely have a positive impact on the mental wellbeing of individuals with pets.	Healthy Lifestyles Officer
<b>Crime and Disorder</b>	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 and Community Services
<b>Procurement</b>	No procurement process required	Housing and Inclusion Manager
<b>Biodiversity and Climate Change</b>	Biodiversity and Climate Change There are no implications on biodiversity and climate change.	Biodiversity and Climate Change Officer

## 2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 2.1 MBC has taken an innovative and flexible approach to individuals who find themselves homeless, in need of accommodation and have a household pet. We developed a policy a few years ago which enables the homeless household to be placed into our own temporary accommodation (TA) 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, and more recently in private nightly paid accommodation, who are owed a statutory or a discretionary duty including many rough sleepers. Currently we are accommodating approximately five to six dogs, across a number of households and we have one former rough sleeper living in self-contained 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.
- 2.3.1 We recently had a case with a former rough sleeping female who was offered a flat by a Registered Provider, who then retracted the offer, even after being supplied with evidence from the psychiatric consultant we work closely with that the pet was a benefit to their well being.

- 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.
- 2.5 Whilst we pursue this overarching aim, we proposed to operate the pilot programme in order to address the concerns that pet owning households may have to separate from existing pets. Under this pilot we enabled households who we owe a duty to secure accommodation under the Homelessness legislation to refuse the first offer if that offer was not suitable for a pet, and/or the landlord refused to accept the pet – as with the case study above. If a household refused a property this would not alter their priority date on the Housing Register as would happen in normal circumstance, and we would not look to discharge them for refusing a suitable offer.
- 2.6 Over the past 12 months our staff have been sensitive to the needs of applicants with pets. As a result, we have had very few cases of individuals refusing an offer of accommodation due to them owning pets and it is more likely to be the receiving landlord who will refuse a household based on pet ownership, as per the case study above. Due to a better awareness at the time of letting, the impact of this pilot has been negligible.
- 2.7 To date we have seven households who have been refused accommodation by a landlord due to pet ownership, this in turn has meant a longer stay in TA for their household.
- 2.8 Even noting 2.7, above, our nightly paid TA costs over the preceding years have continued to fall from £687, 942 in 2019-20 to £510,755 in 2020-21 and to date this financial year we are £46,000 under budget for nightly paid temporary accommodation with that extrapolated up for the year – we would reduce the costs again to approx. £495,000.
- 2.9 The length of stay within TA has also stabilised over the preceding years, even noting 2.7 along with the changes to the Allocations Policy, the average number of days for a household to spend in TA has only risen from 85 to 90.
- 2.10 The development of the 'pet policy' arose out of the untimely death of one of our applicants in temporary accommodation – John Chadwick. His friend, Dee Bonett has campaigned tirelessly both locally and nationally for a more sensitive approach to permitting homeless households to keep their pets whilst they move through the homelessness process.
- 2.11 Most recently Dee Bonett requested that the CHE Committee gives consideration to naming the pet policy in John Chadwick's memory. Whilst this is an unusual request, there does not appear to be a stipulation in the Constitution to prevent this. Therefore the Committee is invited to consider Ms Bonett's request in the recommendation section of the report.

### **3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS**

- 3.1 After the success of the pilot scheme, it is recommended that the pilot policy is adopted and embedded within everyday work.
  - 3.2 Alternatively, we revert to the former approach, which is compliant with the legislation and only offer one suitable option (regardless of suitability for pets) for move on from temporary accommodation, thereby, people with pets are not able to decline an offer as unsuitable. 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.
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### **4. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 4.1 The preferred option is 3.1. as this approach would enable a successful continuation of the work to date. It would ensure those with pets can retain them and we offer a supportive and holistic approach to resettlement for those facing a very stressful and uncertain time whilst being homeless.
- 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.

### **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.

### **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 – MBC Pet Policy

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**9. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

None