

# Arun District Council

<b>REPORT TO:</b>	<b>Housing and Wellbeing Committee</b>
<b>SUBJECT:</b>	<b>Pet Policy Review</b>
<b>LEAD OFFICER:</b>	<b>Richard Tomkinson, Group Head of Housing, Wellbeing &amp; Communities</b>
<b>LEAD MEMBER:</b>	Cllr Carol Birch, Housing and Wellbeing Committee
<b>WARDS:</b>	<b>All</b>
<b>CORPORATE PRIORITY / POLICY CONTEXT / CORPORATE VISION:</b> The report will support the following areas in the corporate vision. Delivering the right homes to the right places by: Supporting those in our community that need help, providing a safety net where necessary and working with people and organisations to meet different needs.	
<b>DIRECTORATE POLICY CONTEXT:</b> To enable responsible pet ownership; balancing the positive impact pets can have, while ensuring they don't negatively affect others or cause a nuisance.	
<b>FINANCIAL SUMMARY:</b> There is no direct financial impact associated with the updated pet policy. Indirect costs, such as legal expenses related to enforcement action for serious breaches of tenancy due to anti-social behaviour, or the impact on environmental cleaning costs, will be covered by existing Housing Revenue Account budgets.	

## 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To seek approval of the updated Pet Policy attached as Appendix 1
- 1.2 By approving the reviewed Pet Policy, this will continue to provide clear guidance to tenants as to what pets we will give approval for, ensuring that we can manage our properties, communal areas and communities effectively.

## 2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 It is recommended that Housing & Wellbeing Committee:
  - 2.1.1 Approve the updated Pets Policy.
  - 2.1.2 Give delegated authority to the Group Head of Housing, Wellbeing and Communities to make minor changes to the policy and any amendments necessary to reflect any operational, legislative and regulatory changes.

### **3. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 3.1 At the Housing and Wellbeing Committee March 2024, Committee approved a programme of policy and strategy reviews and highlighted those that they wished to be subject to Committee approval, including the Pets Policy.
- 3.2 This report details the steps taken and seeks approval for the updated policy.

### **4. DETAIL**

- 4.1 The current Pet Policy was introduced in 2020 and was therefore identified as being due for review.
- 4.2 Members of the Housing and Wellbeing Committee requested that the Pet Policy be amongst policy reviews brought for consideration by the Committee.
- 4.3 As a landlord of social housing Arun District Council is responsible for ensuring that pets in our properties are managed responsibly so that they do not cause a nuisance to other residents and do not cause damage to our homes. Since the introduction of the Policy in 2020, issues of property damage have reduced.
- 4.4 The introduction of the policy provided clear controls and guidance to residents and staff to prevent irresponsible pet ownership which has historically resulted in suffering to animals, nuisance to neighbours, and damage to properties.
- 4.5 Although our tenancy agreement states that some of our properties are suitable/not suitable for pets, and in those that are suitable we will allow a reasonable number of pets, it does not specify which of our properties are suitable or what is generally considered to be a reasonable number. Whilst the tenancy agreement allows the council to act against tenants causing a nuisance, the legal route is costly and generally would not be considered proportionate in all but the most serious cases.
- 4.6 The council routinely receives serious complaints from residents about persistent nuisance resulting from irresponsible pet ownership and keeping pets in unsuitable circumstances. Since the introduction of the policy in 2020 the number of these complaints has reduced significantly and has led to less conflict between residents, freeing up officer resources to deal with more serious matters.
- 4.7 The application of the Pets policy has resulted in far fewer incidents of fouling in internal communal areas and communal gardens resulting in a reduction of environmental cleaning costs and ensures safe and clean environments for our residents and communities.

- 4.8 It has contributed significantly to more responsible pet ownership following complaints as we are able to review against the conditions set out when granting permission for a pet and make consistent and transparent decisions when permission should be withdrawn if nuisance caused by pets is not curtailed.
- 4.9 The Pet Policy has been reviewed due to member interest. As the policy currently meets operational needs, we carried out a full consultation with residents to see whether they agreed with our approach.

## **5. CONSULTATION**

- 5.1 Tenant consultation has been completed. We received 435 responses which overwhelmingly supported our current policy approach.
- 5.2 A summary of responses together with operational responses to each is detailed below and the full consultation results are included at Appendix 2
- 5.3 A promising 75% of respondents said that the policy was either easy or extremely easy to understand, with a further 19% answering neutrally. 69% of our residents agree with the policy as it stands. 71% of residents believe we should not allow large pets in flats, but interestingly, a similar amount (69%) believe large pets should only be allowed if there is a private garden. Consideration about our approach needed when both these scenarios are true (a flat with a private garden.)
- 5.3.1 The policy already gives permission in this circumstance.
- 5.4 More residents (58%) were unaware that a specialist cleaning company was required for pet waste. We should consider including this in the policy and ensure that this information is available for residents.
- 5.4.1 Consideration was given to including this information in the policy but it was felt not appropriate. Tenants will be provided this information when making an application to have a pet.
- 5.5 Common feedback relating to restrictions included limiting the number of pets, not allowing dogs in first floor or above flats, demonstrating ability to look after themselves and manage a tenancy before allowing.
- 5.5.1 This is already contained in the current Policy
- 5.6 60% of respondents answered that there are circumstances where pets should be automatically permitted, and this was commonly service/assistance dogs.

5.6.1 The current Policy permits a resident to have one assistance animal regardless of the property type.

5.7 A roundtable meeting was held with members of Housing & Wellbeing Committee 10 September 2024 to consider a range of representations and the Group Head of Housing, Wellbeing & Communities engaged with staff to consider their views.

5.7.1 Agreement was reached in respect of a key change as follows:

- a. **Original wording:** Flats, or maisonettes, without private gardens; we will not give permission for cats and dogs. We may consider giving permission for smaller domestic pets in cages
- b. **New wording:** Flats, or maisonettes, without private gardens; we will consider giving permission for 1 dog or 1 cat on a case-by-case basis, based on the criteria set out above. We may also consider giving permission for other smaller domestic pets in cages.

5.7.2 Both staff and Members agreed that this change will help to manage consistency of policy application and avoid negative and unnecessary workflow.

5.7.3 In addition, we have included a principle of not unnecessarily withholding permission, and updated the criteria for decision-making as follows:

5.7.4 When considering whether to give permission the council will take the following into consideration:

- a) The terms and conditions of your occupancy agreement
- b) The suitability of your accommodation, including:
  - a. size and type of the property
  - b. size and species of the pet
  - c. house/scheme rules
  - d. access to outside spaces
  - e. communal areas
  - f. number of pets in the block.
- c) Ability to care for the pet including any previous issues with pet ownership
- d) Access to someone to care for the pet in the event of illness or time away
- e) Local issues relating to pets and anti-social behaviour
- f) Any breaches of tenancy relating to noise
- g) Longevity of arrangement e.g. a family member is in hospital.

5.7.5 A Pet Agreement Form (Appendix 3) has been developed for use in giving permission and approving record keeping and our Pets in Council Homes.

5.7.6 Leaflet has been updated to reflect the above changes (Appendix 4).

## **6. OPTIONS / ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED**

6.1 Withdrawal of the Policy, but this would impact the Council's ability to manage its housing stock effectively.

## **7. COMMENTS BY THE GROUP HEAD OF FINANCE/SECTION 151 OFFICER**

7.1 While there is no direct financial impact, it is important to consider potential indirect costs related to enforcement actions for serious breaches of tenancy due to anti-social behaviour, or environmental cleaning expenses, whilst operating this policy, or making subsequent minor changes to it. Any such costs will need to be accommodated within existing Housing Revenue Account budgets.

## **8. RISK ASSESSMENT CONSIDERATIONS**

8.1 Not applicable

## **9. COMMENTS OF THE GROUP HEAD OF LAW AND GOVERNANCE & MONITORING OFFICER**

9.1 The Council is required to comply with the duties imposed by the Equality Act 2010, and in particular the Public Sector Equality Duty. Namely, that the Council must not discriminate against those with a protected characteristic or implement policies which are discriminatory or disadvantage individuals, or groups of individuals.

9.2 The Council must observe and comply with the Human Rights Act 1998 which incorporates the rights set out in the European Convention of Human Rights. The Convention Rights are considered within the Policy Document.

**10. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPACT**

10.1 Not applicable

**11. HEALTH & SAFETY IMPACT**

11.1 Not applicable

**12. PROPERTY & ESTATES IMPACT**

12.1 Not applicable

**13. EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT (EIA) / SOCIAL VALUE**

13.1 Appendix 5

**14. CLIMATE CHANGE & ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT/SOCIAL VALUE**

14.1 Not applicable

**15. CRIME AND DISORDER REDUCTION IMPACT**

15.1 Not applicable

**16. HUMAN RIGHTS IMPACT**

16.1 Not applicable

**17. FREEDOM OF INFORMATION / DATA PROTECTION CONSIDERATIONS**

17.1 Not applicable

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**CONTACT OFFICER:**

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**BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:**

None