



PLYMOUTH COMMUNITY HOMES PETS POLICY

Version:	Last updated – September 2020
Lead Directorate:	Homes and Neighbourhoods
EIA completed:	January 2012
Approved by:	Customer Focus Committee, February 2012

1. Policy aim

Plymouth Community Homes recognises that pet ownership is a rewarding experience, bringing companionship, good health and social benefits to a growing number of people. Properly looked after and well behaved pets are welcomed within most communities. To encourage these positive benefits, we will generally allow responsible pet ownership where it is reasonable to do so.

The aim of this policy is to provide clear, firm and reasonable guidelines that allow a flexible approach to managing pet ownership in PCH homes. This policy will seek to fulfil the following objectives:

- Promote responsible pet ownership
- Safeguard animal welfare
- Ensure fair and equal treatment
- Reflect the views of our customers
- Achieve good practice standards
- Take a strong stance on enforcement
- Support fire safety in our properties

2. Animal welfare

A key concern of this policy is the welfare of any animal housed in a PCH property. Pet owners have a duty of care towards their animals and face prosecution if they fail to observe it. PCH will make information available for pet-owning customers about how the Animal Welfare Act 2006 affects them, and we will take robust action against those who ignore their responsibilities.

3. Who can have a pet

In general tenants are allowed pets except in circumstances defined by the conditions set out in this policy.

3.1 Properties with exclusive use of a garden

Exclusive use of a garden under this section means that the property has a garden which is private to that property, and can be accessed directly from the property. Properties with exclusive use of a garden may include:

- General needs houses
- General needs bungalows
- Some flats
- Some sheltered bungalows in dispersed schemes

Tenants who live in a property with exclusive use of a garden may keep any domestic pet, including up to two cats and two dogs, provided they are not of a breed or type that is legally prohibited or within the unsuitable categories set out in section 6 below.

For tenants who are new after the date of original implementation of this policy – February 2012 - we will ask for a notification of pet ownership. We will also encourage the voluntary signing of a responsible pet owner agreement to support the promotion of responsible pet ownership. For tenants who were already in their property before February 2012, we will encourage voluntary signing of a responsible pet owner agreement when the opportunity is available.

3.2 Properties which do not have exclusive use of a garden

For properties which do not have exclusive use of a garden, pets which reasonably stay in the home (such as caged birds, fish in a tank or small non-poisonous caged reptiles) will be permitted. Pets which leave the home (such as cats and dogs) will not be permitted.

Tenants who were already in their property as at the date of original implementation of this policy – February 2012 – and as at February 2012 already owned a pet which leaves the home, will be permitted to keep that existing pet. However, the pet may not be replaced.

For tenants who are new after the date of original implementation of this policy – February 2012 - we will ask for a notification of pet ownership. For tenants who were already in their property before February 2012, we will encourage voluntary signing of a responsible pet owner agreement when the opportunity is available.

3.3 Sheltered housing

For tenants living in sheltered housing bungalows within dispersed schemes which have exclusive use of a garden, the same rules apply as set out in 3.1 above.

For all other sheltered housing, pets which stay in the home (such as caged birds or fish in a tank) will be permitted. Pets which leave the home (such as cats and dogs) will not be permitted.

Tenants who were already in their property as at the date of original implementation of this policy – February 2012 – and as at February 2012 already owned a pet which leaves the home, will be permitted to keep that existing pet. However, the pet may not be replaced.

For tenants who are new after the date of original implementation of this policy – February 2012 - we will ask for a notification of pet ownership. For tenants who were already in their property before February 2012, we will encourage voluntary signing of a responsible pet owner agreement when the opportunity is available.

3.4 Leasehold properties

Whether a leaseholder is permitted to keep a pet in a leasehold property is determined by the terms of the lease. PCH's standard leases set out terms which mean that in practice leaseholders are expected to comply with the provisions of this policy.

Where the property has been sub-let, the leaseholder will be responsible for ensuring that the terms of the lease are met in respect of pet ownership.

4. Exceptional circumstances

4.1 Discretionary exceptions

The policy above will apply to all new and existing tenants. Exceptions will be made only very rarely, and only where there is no other reasonable option. One example might be:

- A family fleeing domestic violence who have no other suitable offer of accommodation.

In these exceptional circumstances, the case would need to be approved by one of the Heads of Services from the Homes, Neighbourhoods and Regeneration Directorate, and appropriately recorded.

4.2 Assistance dogs and disability needs

By definition, Assistance Dogs are not pets and are therefore excluded from the main provisions of this policy. By Assistance Dogs, we mean dogs that have been trained specifically to assist people with a disability, such as sight or hearing loss, restricted mobility, autism or post traumatic stress disorder.

For new and existing tenants, we will ask for a notification of use of an Assistance Dog.

For other disability needs - but only for those where we have evidence to show that they fall within the Equality Act 2010 - we will consider requests for 'reasonable adjustments' to be made as part of an overall needs assessment. Any consideration will be subject to all provisions in this policy, including those relating to fire safety, animal welfare and

nuisance. 'Reasonable adjustments' may include, for example, offer of suitable alternative accommodation.

5. Breeding, keeping large numbers of pets and pet-sitting

The breeding of any animal for sale or profit is not allowed.

Keeping a large number of pets in the property, such that they pose a threat to health and animal welfare, or are causing a nuisance, is not allowed. Such cases will be dealt with as part of a multi-agency approach.

Visitors with dogs are permitted provided no nuisance is caused and the visits are occasional.

Pet sitters will be responsible for complying with this policy when pet sitting for any pet that falls within the provisions set out.

6. Categories of pets

In general, pets that fall within the permitted provisions of this policy may be any of the following:

- Dog
- Cat
- Bird
- Fish
- Small caged rodent, e.g. guinea pigs, rabbits, hamsters
- Small non-poisonous caged reptile
- Non-poisonous contained insect or amphibian

Animals that do not fall within any permitted provisions of this policy are:

- Farm animals – for example, sheep, goats, pigs, cattle, horses, ducks.
- Animals registered under the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976. Examples of animals registered under the Act are certain types of venomous snake, certain types of spider and various breeds of monkey.
- Dogs specified in the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991. The following breeds are specifically banned: Pit Bull Terrier, Japanese Tosa, Dogo Argentino, Fila Brasileiro.

In some circumstances, where properties have exclusive use of sufficient space, permission may be given for chickens or pigeons, up to an appropriate maximum number for the space available. However, prior permission - which will specify the maximum number - will need to be given by PCH. (Permission will not be given for cockerels).

Prior permission will be required for cat/dog flaps, or large structures in gardens, e.g. aviaries. Cat/dog flaps must never be installed where this would cause a fire risk, for

example, in a fire door. Permission will not be given for hutches in communal areas. Pets may not be kept in garages.

7. Promoting responsible pet ownership

A responsible pet owner is someone who has the knowledge and ability to care adequately for the health and wellbeing of their pet, as well as being able to control its behaviour effectively to avoid causing nuisance to others. We recognise that the vast majority of pet owners are responsible, not least because they value the relationship with their pet very highly.

In the spirit of a positive approach, for tenants who are new after the date of original implementation of this policy – February 2012 - we will ask for a notification of pet ownership. For tenants who were already in their property before February 2012, we will encourage voluntary signing of a responsible pet owner agreement when the opportunity is available. The agreement provides a set of behaviour guidelines, highlighting the standards expected of pet owners. By signing it, pet owners are demonstrating to themselves and to us that they understand and are committed to meeting their obligations.

We will encourage dog and cat owners to microchip their pets.

We will make available information which signposts anyone interested in owning a pet, new tenants or anyone reporting nuisance or making a complaint to further guidance.

We will make this policy available to new and existing tenants to ensure they are aware of PCH's policy on pets.

8. Causing a nuisance

It is a breach of the tenancy agreement to allow any animal to cause a nuisance to anyone in the locality, including our employees, contractors and agents.

Of the many forms of pet-related nuisance, fouling is of most widespread concern as far as our customers are concerned. Not only does it disfigure the communal areas, it is also a potentially serious health hazard, particularly for young children. As it is a specific breach of tenancy, tough action will be taken against those who allow pets to foul in shared areas or on roads or footpaths or in play-spaces in the local area.

Tough action will also been taken against pet owners who allow their pets to cause other types of nuisance, such as:

- Excessive noise, especially barking
- Aggressive animals (see 'status' dogs below)
- Over-population of animals within a household
- Roaming and unattended animals
- Unpleasant odours from pets

Nuisance includes situations where a pet owner's actions or lack of actions result in a fire safety hazard or the occurrence of unwanted fire signals.

Damage to property caused by pets is the responsibility of the tenant who will have to meet the cost of any repairs or remedial works.

9. 'Status' dogs

We recognise there is growing trend for certain breeds of dog to be acquired for 'status' purposes, which usually involves anti-social behaviour and/or in some cases dog fighting. It is not the breeds themselves that are the problem; it is the irresponsible behaviour of their owners. Therefore, we may withdraw permission to own a dog where there is evidence that aggressive or anti-social behaviour likely to intimidate or pose a danger to others is being encouraged.

10. Enforcing the policy

By promoting responsible pet ownership we will aim to limit the likelihood of nuisance occurring. Where it does occur, the Housing Officer will:

- Initially seek to resolve matters informally.
- If the nuisance persists and the matter is a breach of tenancy, follow the appropriate procedures for dealing with breaches of tenancy.
- If the matter is deemed to be anti-social behaviour, follow the appropriate procedures for dealing with anti-social behaviour.

The actions we may pursue include:

- Mediation.
- Withdrawing permission to keep an animal.
- Restricting the number of animals.
- Making responsible pet ownership part of an Acceptable Behaviour Contract.
- Involving statutory organisations such as the Police or the Local Authority.
- Involving voluntary organisations such as the RSPCA.
- Serving an injunction to oblige the owner to start or stop undertaking certain actions or to remove the animal.
- Demoting or terminating the tenancy where tenancy conditions are breached.

We recognise that pet-related nuisance can affect the quality of life for neighbouring residents and can also be a symptom of animal ill treatment. Firm and consistent enforcement will therefore be necessary both to protect animals and retain the confidence of customers in our responsible pet ownership approach.

There is also a wealth of expertise and assistance to be drawn on from other agencies working in the field, and we will maximise our efforts to reap the benefits of multi-agency partnership working.

11. Dealing with cruelty and neglect

Where a member of staff witnesses or suspects cruelty or neglect they will report this to the RSPCA. Where cruelty or neglect is reported to PCH by a third party, PCH will also report this to the RSPCA making it clear they have not witnessed this themselves. The person reporting this to the Association will also be encouraged to contact the RSPCA.

12. Complaints, Monitoring and Feedback

12.1 Complaints and monitoring

Complaints about pet nuisance should be made through the normal complaints procedure. Complainants will be kept informed about how any action is progressing.

Estate inspections will monitor areas for evidence of nuisance or continuing nuisance. Where nuisance is identified follow up action will be taken as appropriate.

12.2 Right of Appeal

Where a decision to withhold or withdraw permission has been challenged as unfair, applicants may request a review of the decision by a Senior Housing Officer. In considering the case, the Senior Housing Officer will ensure that the provisions of this policy have been applied accurately and fairly.

13. Equality & Diversity

This policy will be applied in a fair and consistent manner, respecting the diverse needs of all of our customers.

Copies of this policy and related documents will be available in other formats.

14. Customer Involvement

This policy has been produced in partnership with organisations representing our customers.

Through the work of our Communities Team we will incorporate, where appropriate, responsible pet owner activities within our consultation events and fun days.

15. Data Protection

In applying this policy, all members of staff will comply with PCH's Data Protection policy and ensure that the confidentiality of personal information supplied by customers is protected at all times.

16. Value for Money

In promoting responsible pet ownership, we aim to take a positive approach to nuisance prevention that will reduce time spent investigating complaints, ensure efficient delivery of relevant services, and reduce time spent on resolving problems after the event.

17. Review

We will monitor this policy to ensure it meets good practice and current legislation and will review it in accordance with our review timetable for all policies.