



KEY POLICY: *SERVICE DELIVERY*

Last Reviewed: New Policy

Date: December 2009

Review: December 2011

PET POLICY

1.0 Policy Statement

South Lakes Housing (SLH) recognises the benefits that responsible pet ownership can bring. However, controls must be in place to prevent irresponsible pet ownership which can cause suffering to animals and a nuisance to neighbours.

This policy sets out the objectives and standards which will apply in respect to keeping pets in SLH properties.

2.0 Key Strategic Links

- Cumbria Housing Strategy 2006 – 2011
- South Lakeland Sustainable Community Strategy 2008 - 2028

3.0 Key Policy Links

This Policy should be read in conjunction with our Succession and Assignment, Allocations and Lettings, Anti-Social Behaviour, Special Needs and Vulnerable Persons Policies.

4.0 Key Objectives and Standards

The Key objectives of the Pet policy are:

- To comply with all relevant regulatory guidance and the law;
- To ensure that guidelines are in place for the proper authorisation by SLH officers to allow tenants to keep pets in their homes;
- To treat residents in a fair and non-discriminatory way, in accordance with our E & D Policy;

Guidance to housing staff in respect of requests from existing and prospective tenants to keep pets:

- Tenants will normally be allowed to keep pets in their home, as long as they are well cared for and responsibly kept. However there are exceptions and the property must be suitable for their needs
- Permission to keep pets will not normally be required in SLH properties under most circumstances. However, tenants may need to request permission if they live in a flat or certain types of sheltered housing

- Some properties are not suitable for keeping certain types of animals. Clear guidance has to be given when someone wants to keep a cat or dog in a flat or property with a communal entrance
- South Lakes Housing acknowledges that people will keep cats and dogs in flats. However tenants may be asked to register their pet voluntarily or if a complaint has been received about its behaviour
- Tenants should keep rabbits and guinea pigs in gardens so a property without a private garden is not suitable. Communal gardens are not suitable for keeping pets
- Some sheltered housing schemes are not allowed pets. Tenants who live in sheltered housing where pets are allowed will be asked to register any pets with the Scheme Manager
- If the property is suitable, most domestic animals including cats, dogs, rabbits, rodents, fish, caged birds such as budgies and parrots, and reptiles such as lizards can be kept
- Tenants should keep pets securely where they cannot escape and make sure all animals have enough room for exercise. Guide dogs and other support dogs will always be allowed
- There are four breeds of dangerous dogs which are illegal – pit bull terriers, Japanese tosas, the Dogo Argentinos and the Fila Brasileiros. Cross breeds of these dogs are also illegal. Dogs of other breeds, such as rotweillers, are dangerous dogs if they have ever attacked a person in public. Keeping these is also illegal
- Tenants must not keep any wild animals such as crocodiles, big cats, wolves etc.
- Tenants must not keep any other animal which may be dangerous such as a poisonous snake or a poisonous spider
- Other animals which must not be kept in SLH homes include livestock and horses. For requests to keep other animals such as poultry/pigeons, Housing Officers should seek advice from their line manager
- Tenants must not keep more than two cats or two reasonably sized dogs, subject to the size of their property. Tenants may keep more small animals such as rabbits, gerbils, mice, guinea pigs, fish, birds and reptiles as long as they are kept in tanks / cages which are big enough for them. All animals should have enough room for exercise
- SLH properties are unsuitable for commercial breeding
- Tenants should be made aware that staff working for SLH should be shown a reasonable duty of care when visiting their property and that tenants are responsible for ensuring their pets do not cause a nuisance. Staff can request that pets are kept in a separate room whilst a visit is being carried out
- The tenancy agreement states in regard to animals:

You (or anyone living with you) **must not** keep any animal that we decide is unsuitable for your home or garden. If you are in any doubt at all contact your local housing officer for advice. All wild animals are considered to be unsuitable.

You (or anyone living with you) **must not** keep without our written permission a dog in a flat or a maisonette with a shared entrance.

You (or anyone living with you) **must not** keep a pet that is prohibited by the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991, or by any other law.

You are responsible for the behaviour of any pets owned by you or anyone living with you.

You must take all reasonable steps to supervise and keep such pets under control.

You must take all reasonable steps to prevent such pets causing nuisance, annoyance or damage to other people. You must ensure that your pets do not foul or cause damage to the house, your neighbour's property, anything belonging to the Council or anything we are responsible for, such as communal areas.

If the tenant breaks any of the rules in this policy or if they do not keep their animals in a responsible manner, SLH will be able to take action against them for breaching their tenancy agreement

Housing staff should also refer to the 'Guidance For Tenants' leaflet when dealing with pet related issues. Sections include:-

- Responsible Pet Ownership – questions tenants need to consider before keeping a pet
- Do's and don'ts of keeping pets
- Advice regarding vets bills
- What tenants can do if they can not look after their pet
- What tenants should do if their dog attacks someone

Complaints regarding Pet Nuisance

i) What constitutes nuisance behaviour by a pet

This is not an exhaustive list, but here are some examples of behaviour that South Lakes Housing staff should treat as a nuisance:

- Roaming and unattended animals
- Pets fouling in communal areas and in owners' gardens and this not being cleared up immediately
- Pets fouling in neighbours' gardens
- Excessive noise
- Over-population of animals within a household
- Unpleasant odours from pets
- Aggressive animals

ii) What to do if residents are having problems with a pet owned by an SLH tenant

If the complainant feels able to, then ask them to approach the owner and see if they can sort out the matter informally. Suggested approaches to the complainant:

- Take early action - don't wait until the situation is unbearable and their patience has been exhausted before approaching the owner
- Try not to jump to conclusions - listen to the other person's response and don't make unfounded allegations
- Try to remain calm - do not shout or make abusive remarks and do not retaliate
- If you feel at risk or threatened then walk away

If the complainant is not confident about approaching the owner then the Housing Officer should contact the problem tenant.

iii) Action South Lakes Housing can take concerning nuisance pets

In the vast majority of cases SLH will try to resolve the issue informally after hearing both sides of the story. If this does not work then there are a number of more formal approaches SLH can take. This includes:

- Arranging for a professional mediator to become involved
- Working with tenants to set up an 'Estate Agreement' if the issue affects a number of residents. This is basically a set of rules developed by residents which describes what is acceptable behaviour for their area. Responsible pet ownership could form part of this Agreement
- Withdrawing permission for an animal to be kept

- Restricting the number of animals kept at a property if this is likely to resolve the problem
- Making responsible pet ownership part of an Acceptable Behaviour Contract - this is a formal contract signed by the person causing the problem, SLH and in some cases a third party such as the police
- Involving statutory organisations such as the Police or the Local Authority environmental health department
- 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
- Terminating the tenancy where tenancy conditions are breached

5.0 Policy Implementation

The Director of Operations is responsible for the overall implementation of the pet policy and must make all relevant staff aware of the Pet Policy.

6.0 Key Targets and Performance Indicators

- Number of pet related nuisance complaints to be measured
- Number of sheltered housing tenants who have requested permission to keep pets

7.0 Monitoring, Review and Consultation Process

- Annual report to tenants
- Consultation with tenants and tenant representative groups
- Consultation with other relevant agencies

8.0 Service Development and Comprehensive Service Review Priority

Changes to the service may take place as the result of the work of relevant Service Improvement Groups with tenant representation. The policy will be reviewed at least once every three years to ensure that it is meeting the current needs of the community, and to ensure that it takes into consideration any changes to legislation at any given time.

9.0 Equality and Diversity

South Lakes Housing recognises that there is a broad range of visible and non-visible differences that characterise its tenants. Some of these qualities include race, religion, culture, nationality, ethnic background, colour, disability, sex, sexual orientation, age, literacy and income level. By understanding and respecting this diversity it is able to set a policy which ensures that all tenants are able to access services provided by South Lakes Housing in an equitable manner.

South Lakes Housing is committed to providing information and services equally and without discrimination so that they meet the needs of all sections of the community. These include our tenants, leaseholders and those living nearby or seeking access to or information on housing services in the South Lakeland area. In carrying out all housing management policies, South Lakes Housing's Equality and Diversity Policy will be adhered to.