

Committee	Date:
Housing Management & Almshouses Sub Committee	14 July 2015
Subject: Pets Policy	Public
Report of: Director of Community & Children's Services	For Decision

Summary

The City of London has historically operated a 'no pets' policy on all its housing estates (apart from small pets such as gerbils, fish etc). As part of the 2013/14 annual satisfaction survey, we asked residents for their views on keeping pets. Responses indicated that we should review the policy. Although a huge majority of residents were opposed to allowing dogs, there was a clear mandate for permitting indoor cats to be kept.

In order to respond to residents' wishes, a new Pets Policy has been developed. The key points of the new policy are:

- small pets continue to be allowed;
- up to two house cats are permitted per property;
- dogs are not permitted unless the resident has sole use of a private garden or the dog is a registered guide/hearing/assistance dog;
- guide/hearing/assistance dogs must be registered with a member organisation of Assistance Dogs International (ADI) or the International Guide Dog Federation (IGDF).

House cats are to be kept indoors at all times. The RSPCA and PETA were consulted when developing the new policy and keeping cats inside is not detrimental to the cats' health or wellbeing, as long as certain guidelines are followed. Links to the guidance are included in the policy.

Pets are to be kept out of communal areas at all times and residents must ensure they do not cause a nuisance to others or damage to property.

Breeding, fighting or selling animals from a City of London property is strictly prohibited.

Recommendation

Members are asked to:

- Approve the new Pets Policy, to be adopted on all City estates.

Main Report

Background

1. The City of London Housing Service has historically operated a 'no pets' policy on all of its housing estates, although small pets such as gerbils and goldfish are permitted. However, the results of our annual satisfaction survey in 2013/14 showed that on several estates, the majority of residents feel this should be reviewed. As a result, a new Pets Policy has been developed (Appendix 1).
2. This policy will apply to all estates and, if approved, will take immediate effect.

Current Position

3. The existing policy allows small pets but specifically prohibits the keeping of cats and dogs, other than registered assistance dogs. The only exception is in the small number of houses with private gardens on our estates. Most of these are freehold properties and we have no jurisdiction to impose a ban on dogs for these.
4. Consultation has revealed that, whilst some residents are in favour of dogs, the vast majority remain opposed, and have expressed fears about dog-fouling, dangerous animals and nuisance behaviour.
5. However, our survey indicated that many residents are in favour of allowing cats, particularly if these are kept indoors. We are, therefore, proposing to amend our policy.

Proposed New Policy

6. The new policy allows residents to keep up to two house cats per property. These animals are not permitted in communal areas, including outside, and residents must ensure their pets do not cause a nuisance to others or damage to property.
7. Dogs are still not permitted, unless the resident has sole use of a private garden or the dog is a registered guide/hearing/assistance dog. We have specified that assistance dogs must be registered by an accredited member organisation of Assistance Dogs International (ADI) or the International Guide Dog Federation (IGDF). A full list of accredited organisations is attached at the end of the new policy (Appendix 1).
8. In the consultation, a small number of residents suggested that we consider allowing 'psychological assistance' dogs to be kept by people with mental health issues. However, although there is a movement to advocate for these dogs, there is no accreditation or formal training scheme in place at present and no registration for these animals. If this changes, we will look again at this issue.
9. Other small domestic pets, such as hamsters, fish etc, are still permitted.

10. The new policy clearly sets out residents' responsibilities with regards to caring for their pets and ensuring they do not cause a nuisance to others or damage to property. It also states that the breeding, fighting or selling of any animals in a City of London property is strictly prohibited.
11. During the development of the new draft policy, we initially used guidelines for landlords published by the Dogs Trust, and proposed to require pets to be registered with the Estate Office and a pet plan to be drawn up and adhered to. However, further consultation with residents showed that most felt this was too complicated and difficult to enforce. Having considered this criticism, we decided to simplify our approach and leave the responsibility for pet welfare in the hands of the owners.

Options

12. We could maintain the existing 'no pets' policy on all our estates. However, feedback from residents shows that on most estates, they would like the option of keeping indoor cats. This is an issue that comes up a lot, so to simply ignore these requests and keep the blanket 'no pets' approach may well simply lead to more complaints about this approach, which many see as archaic. In addition, we have become aware, through the consultation, that many residents already keep indoor cats. If we retain the existing policy, this puts us in the extremely difficult position of either having to enforce it and insist that these residents get rid of their pets, or to turn a blind eye.
13. We could agree to hold the policy centrally and let Estate Managers decide whether to adopt it or to keep the original 'no pets' policy. This would mean a more localised approach based on residents' feedback, but would lead to confusion when allocating properties or arranging transfers, as people may move from one estate which allows pets, to another estate which does not.
14. We could adopt this policy for all our estates, ensuring residents are clear on the rules around keeping pets in our properties and estate management are able to more easily monitor and take action against anyone breaching the terms of the new policy. Officer recommend this approach.

Proposals

15. That Members approve the new Pets Policy, to be adopted for all our estates.

Implications

16. We have taken advice from the RSPCA and PETA when developing this policy and they are clear that keeping cats indoors does not adversely impact on their health as long as certain guidelines are followed. We have included links to this guidance in the policy document.
17. Estate staff will need to take action against any residents breaching the terms of the new policy. This may be difficult, especially if cats are left to roam outdoors. It may take time to build up a case (taking photos, logging any incidents etc), and

will require the assistance of residents, but we are confident that they are equipped to manage the challenge. All estates now have cameras, mobile working device such as iPads and this will help to maintain records of any policy breaches.

Conclusion

The new Pets Policy was developed following consultation with residents, the majority of whom were in favour of being permitted to keep pets. The policy states that up to two house cats are now permitted per property. Dogs are still not permitted, unless residents have the sole use of a private garden or the dog is a registered guide/hearing or assistance dog. Small domestic pets are permitted. Residents are responsible for ensuring their pet(s) do not cause nuisance to people living on the estate and that they do not cause damage to property. The breeding/fighting/selling of animals from a City of London property is strictly prohibited.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Pets Policy

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