

City of London Corporation Committee Report

Committee: Housing Management & Almshouses Sub-Committee	Dated: 28/11/2024
Subject: Pets Policy Consultation	Public report: For Decision
This proposal: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provides statutory duties • delivers Corporate Plan 2024-29 outcomes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diverse Engaged Communities • Providing Excellent Services
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	No
If so, how much?	£
What is the source of Funding?	N/A
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?	N/A
Report of: Judith Finlay, Executive Director of Community and Children's Services	
Report authors: Liam Gillespie, Head of Housing Management, Department of Community & Children's Services (Housing Division) Sam Bedford, Resident Involvement Manager, Department of Community and Children's Services (Housing Division)	

Summary

The purpose of this report is to inform Members of the outcome of the recent resident consultation on the Housing Division's Pets Policy, which focused on the question of dog ownership.

Several workshops were held for residents to discuss the policy and express their views on how the resident survey should be conducted. The survey, which was carried out by an independent organisation, received an excellent response with over 1,200 returns. The result was that 58% of respondents were against allowing dog ownership, with 40.5% in favour. This report provides further details of the results of the survey.

Given the strong sentiment expressed by a clear majority of residents, it is proposed that the current policy is maintained, and Members are asked to re-approve the Pets Policy for use by the Housing Division.

Recommendations

Members are asked to:

- Note the report.
- Approve the attached Pets Policy, which maintains the current position in relation to dog ownership, in line with the majority resident view following consultation

Main Report

Background

1. The Housing Division's Pets Policy was last approved in January 2021. At that time, it was agreed that the Housing Division would carry out a more detailed consultation on dog ownership in 2024. This report explains the steps taken as part of the consultation workshops, and the result of the subsequent survey of residents on the issue of dog ownership.
2. While the whole policy was up for discussion, the most contentious issue is dog ownership. This part of the policy tends to be the most discussed and gives rise to the strongest views from residents. It is perhaps unsurprising that this question became the focus of the consultation following discussions held at the various resident workshops.

Resident Consultation

3. An initial consultation plan was devised that included multiple workshops both online and in person, to understand residents' ideas and priorities about both the way in which the consultation and survey took place, and any thoughts on what a potential future Pets Policy might look like.
4. Calm Mediation was engaged to facilitate the consultation workshops, as an independent organisation, allowing residents to feel comfortable sharing their views and opinions.
5. Alongside facilitating a discussion on how, and by what method, the consultation should take place, and what residents felt would be fair, the Housing Division requested that the following two questions were put to the attendees of the consultation sessions to generate discussion:

- i. How do you think that dog ownership could be managed if it were to be allowed?*
- ii. What sort of issues do you think might arise and how could these be dealt with?*

6. Calm Mediation held ten in-person workshops and two online sessions, with some sessions held solely for sheltered housing residents. A total of 82 residents attended one of our general needs consultation workshops, which were scheduled for evening slots between 5:30 – 7:00pm.

27 February	Online via Microsoft Teams
4 March	Middlesex Street Estate, Artizan Street Library
5 March	Golden Lane Estate, Sir Ralph Perring Centre
6 March	Dron House Community Hall
7 March	Online via Microsoft Teams
11 March	York Way & Holloway Estates, Holloway Estate Community Centre
12 March	Southwark Estate Office
13 March	Avondale Square Estate Community Centre
14 March	Windsor House Community Hall

7. Additionally, specific workshops were held at our sheltered housing schemes as follows:

18 March	Isleden House
19 March	Harman Close
22 March	Almshouses

Outcome of Consultation Workshops

- 8. Two key recommendations that came out of the consultation workshops were that we use a fair and independent ballot process to ensure as high a turnout as possible and deliver a fair and transparent result from the survey. Residents also asked that we provide as much information as possible to enable people to make an informed decision.
- 9. The common themes on which residents wanted further information included the Housing Division’s management of a policy if dogs were to be permitted, what the potential impact on service charges might be, plus information on how the survey would operate.
- 10. In response to residents requesting an independent survey, we partnered with Acuity, an organisation with over 25 years’ experience in conducting fair and resident-focused surveys, to help us draft and run the survey process. Colleagues from Housing Management, Estate Services, Home Ownership and the Comptroller & City Solicitors’ Department helped draft the Information Booklet, which included responses to several issues raised by residents during the consultation. This was shared with residents alongside the survey. This booklet is attached as **Appendix One**.

Survey Methodology

11. Acuity advised on the methodology for the survey and how to achieve a statistically certain result. The aim was to generate at least 500 responses, on a 'one vote per household' basis. A paper survey was sent to 2,745 households, with a return envelope included, which is attached at **Appendix Two**.
12. Each survey had a unique reference number, which enabled Acuity to ensure that only one response was received per household, and to monitor responses by estate.
13. Acuity advised not to include a 'don't know' option on the question of dog ownership, as this could muddy the results from which Members would have to make a yes or no decision anyway, so it was made clear this would not help us get to a statistically certain result.

Results

14. In answer to the question on dog ownership, the results were:

Do you think the City of London Housing Service's Pets Policy should be updated to allow residents to have one dog (with prior permission)?

Response	Respondents	Percentage
No	721	58%
Yes	496	40.5%
No Response	18	1.5%
Total	1,235	100%

15. We received 1,235 responses from 2,745 delivered, which is a turnout of 45%. For this number of responses, the margin of error is +/- 3.0%, which means a difference of more than 6% is needed for it to be statistically significant. The difference between Yes and No responses is 18%, which is 3 times the required difference. The result is therefore reliable and statistically significant.
16. A full breakdown of the results by estate is shown at Appendix Three. Members will note that, although the results on some estates were close, only one estate had a majority in favour of allowing dog ownership (Windsor House), though this was only by a handful of votes.
17. There was a noticeable difference in sentiment between tenants and leaseholders; 73% of leaseholder respondents responded 'no' to dog ownership, while among tenants the figure was 52%.

Renters' Rights Bill

18. Members may be aware of proposals to give private tenants in England and Wales strengthened rights regarding keeping pets in rented accommodation, as part of a wider suite of reforms contained in the Renters' Rights Bill, which is currently at the Committee stage in the House of Commons. The Bill will make amendments to the Housing Act 1988 in respect of private sector rental agreements, which are usually Assured Shorthold tenancies. These will be abolished, and private tenancies will take effect as Assured Tenancies with no fixed term and enhanced security of tenure.
19. The Bill will insert section 16A into the Housing Act 1988 and imply a term into all Assured tenancies, giving private tenants the right to request to keep a pet, which landlords must not unreasonably refuse. The Bill does not propose giving a blanket right to tenants to have a pet without seeking permission.
20. The proposals apply only to the private rented sector and do not affect social housing, which is expressly excluded in the Bill. Assured tenancies provided by housing associations, and Secure tenancies of the kind provided by local authority landlords, will remain unchanged.
21. Leasehold properties within the City Corporation's housing stock, if sub-let, are technically part of the private rented sector. However, the Renters' Rights Bill includes a provision (clause 10) that the private landlord (i.e. the leaseholder) may reasonably refuse permission for their sub-tenant to keep a pet if giving consent would put the landlord in breach of a superior agreement (in this case, their lease). As the City Corporation's leases contain strict terms on pet ownership, these would take priority. A situation where private renters within our stock enjoy rights that our own tenants do not have will therefore be avoided.
22. While the Renters' Rights Bill does not directly affect the City Corporation's management of its housing stock, and the proposed Pets Policy, further consideration will need to be given to our approach in future, as there may be equalities implications in maintaining a more restrictive position on pet ownership for social housing tenancies compared to the private rented sector. It is proposed that the City Corporation's policy is reviewed again once the Renters' Rights Bill is finally passed, and the full legal and equalities implications become clear. This is unlikely to happen before mid-2025, and given the scale of some of the reforms, some parts of the Act may not commence immediately following Royal Assent.

Recommendation

23. It is recommended that the attached Pets Policy (**Appendix Four**) is approved, with the current position on dog ownership remaining unchanged following the clear result of the resident consultation.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

Strategic implications – The Pets Policy forms part of a suite of policies designed to promote clarity and consistency in the management of the City Corporation’s housing estates, and therefore supports the aim of Delivering Excellent Services.

Financial implications – none.

Resource implications – none.

Legal implications – none.

Risk implications – none.

Equalities implications – The Pets Policy seeks to balance the need to manage our housing estates effectively with relevant equalities considerations. The Policy enables exceptions to be made to the stated policy approach in line with the Equality Act 2010, for instance in relation to dog ownership. Officers will have due regard to equalities duties when making decisions in accordance with the Pets Policy.

Climate implications – none.

Security implications – none.

Conclusion

24. The Housing Division’s Pets Policy has been reviewed and a substantial resident consultation exercise undertaken as part of this process. This involved holding resident workshops across City Corporation housing estates, to seek residents’ views on the current policy, particularly on the issue of dog ownership, which tends to dominate discussion on the policy.

25. As a result of the workshops, a survey was issued to every household, along with an information booklet summarising the outcomes of the resident consultations. The survey was conducted by an independent organisation, Acuity Research and Practice, and 1,235 responses were received (45% of households on City Corporation estates).

26. In answer to the question on dog ownership, 58% of households responded to the effect that the current prohibition on dogs should be maintained (with some exceptions); 40.5% were in favour of allowing dogs.

27. It is therefore recommended that the Pets Policy is approved with no changes. This will be reviewed again in 2027, or sooner if there is a need to do so.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Pets Policy Information Booklet
- Appendix 2 - Copy of survey sent to all households
- Appendix 3 – Full results breakdown
- Appendix 4 – Pets Policy (version

Liam Gillespie

Head of Housing Management
Department of Community and Children's Services (Housing Division)

T: 020 7332 3785

E: liam.gillespie@cityoflondon.gov.uk

Sam Bedford

Resident Involvement Manager
Department of Community and Children's Services (Housing Division)

T: 020 7332 3765

E: sam.bedford@cityoflondon.gov.uk