Diversity
impact assessment

TITLE
Name / description of the issue being assessed
Pets Policy

DATE
Date the DIA is completed
30th May 2017

LEAD OFFICER
Name, title and dept of person responsible for carrying out the DIA.
Katherine Bishop – Business Development Officer

1 Summary description of the proposed change
• What is the change to policy / service / new project that is being proposed?
• How does it compare with the current situation?

The Pets Policy has been reviewed and updated to ensure that it reflects current legislation and is easy to understand for our residents. Following a consultation with tenants the policy has been updated to align with other housing providers and change the line in the current policy that states max 1 large or 2 small dogs just to max 2 dogs. The policy has also been updated to allow for 1 cat to be kept for 1 cat to be kept in a 1 bedroom property.

2 Summary of evidence used to support this assessment
• Eg: Feedback from consultation, performance information, service user records etc.
• Eg: Comparison of service user profile with Medway Community Profile

1. The number and type of pets allowed in a property is dependent on the size of the property, sole use of a garden and suitability of the animal for the property.

2. Good practice from the RSPCA website has been sought whilst compiling this policy. The Council will not grant permission when a tenant does not have adequate space in their home or garden for the type of pet they are applying to keep.

If a number of other pets already exist in the property, permission will not be given where a new pet will affect their welfare. Health, safety and hygiene will all be considered. Too many pets in a property will also cause a nuisance to neighbours or damage to the property.

Where permission is granted, tenants are responsible for the health and welfare of their pets. Under the Animal Welfare Act 2006, this is called a duty of care. This requires proper day-to-day management and care of the pet.

3. Tenants have a duty to look after their pets responsibly and must not allow them to cause a nuisance to their neighbours, any member of their own household or any other member of the public. Tenants will also be held responsible for the behaviour of any pets bought into their homes or
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neighbourhoods by their visitors.

If a pet is found to be causing a nuisance or annoyance, the Council will manage the incident in line with its Antisocial Behaviour [ASB] Policy and Procedure. The following are examples of incidents that will be recorded and managed as antisocial behaviour:

- Excessive barking or any other loud noise causing a disturbance.
- Dogs or any other animals being used to intimidate people.
- Pets causing damage to Council property beyond reasonable wear and tear.

4. The Pets policy was originally taken to the Customer Sounding Board for review on 21st February 2017. The following comments;

- Customers fed back that there was inconsistency and grey areas in the current policy around the number of cats and dogs allowed to be kept in a property, some examples are:

- currently if you have a bedsits/one bed flat you could only have a cat if you have sole use of a garden, but if you had a 2/3 bed flats/maisonettes you could have a cat without having sole use of a garden.

- The current policy states for 2/3 bed flats/maisonettes you can have max 1 large or 2 small dogs, but it is confusing for people to tell what is classed as a large or small dog and difficult Housing Services to enforce this.

- Customers also highlighted the amount of mess and noise caused by some animals.

5. Housing services completed a comparison of other Housing Providers Pets policy for benchmarking. The majority allow 2 dogs in 2+ bed properties subject to sole use of garden. The majority do not seem restrict cats in properties with no garden.

6. As per feedback from the Customer Sounding Board and the Housing Manager the Pets Policy was provisionally amended to consult tenants on the proposed change to reduced the number of dogs to a maximum of one per property and the number of cats to 1 if no garden and max of 2 if sole use of a garden.

7. The Pets Policy was put online for customer consultation for a 2 week period. 23 email responses, one telephone call and one letter were received from customers.
Customer responses following consultation:

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agree with policy</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree with policy</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General enquiry</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
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- 8 of the respondents felt that the number of dogs allowed in 2/3 bed properties should not be reduced from two to one. There were also concerns raised that tenants mental health may be affected if the number of dogs allowed in properties is reduced.

- As a result the following is recommended: Keep current policy rule around the number of Dogs in properties (Currently 1 Dog if 1 bedroom property and sole use of garden, max 1 large or 2 small dogs if 2+ bedroom properties and sole use of garden).

- However following feedback from the customer sounding board and the difficulty for officers in determining what counts as a small or large dog it is recommended to align with other housing providers and change the line in the current policy that states max 1 large or 2 small dogs just to max 2 dogs.

3 What is the likely impact of the proposed change?
Is it likely to:
- Adversely impact on one or more of the protected characteristic groups?
- Advance equality of opportunity for one or more of the protected characteristic groups?
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't?

(insert ✓ in one or more boxes)

Protected characteristic groups  Adverse impact  Advance equality  Foster good relations
Age ✓
Disability ✓
Gender reassignment
Marriage/civil partnership
Pregnancy/maternity
Race
Religion/belief
Sex

March 2014
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Sexual orientation

Other (eg low income groups)

4 Summary of the likely impacts

- Who will be affected?
- How will they be affected?

Studies have shown that pet ownership can enhance the owner’s mental and physical health and encourage exercise, plus pets make great companions. However, while pets can have a very positive impact on their environment, irresponsibly owned pets can be the cause of much misery and suffering to the animals themselves and to those who live around them.

Tenants will be unable to keep pets in properties that are deemed unsuitable due to the size of the property or lack of private use of a garden, as this would be detrimental to the animal’s health and well being.

Dogs may only be kept in a house or flat/maisonette/bungalow if the property has sole use of a garden. Permission for a dog will not be given if the property does not have a garden or has a shared garden. To take into account the needs of tenants who may require a care dog, the policy states that ‘tenants who are registered blind/disabled and who need a care dog are the only exception to this rule’

Older customers who reside in Homes for Independent Living schemes are unable to keep dogs (except care dogs), as there are only communal areas at the property. This is to prevent ASB to other residents in the property or undue damage to council property.

5 What actions can be taken to mitigate likely adverse impacts, improve equality of opportunity or foster good relations?

- Are there alternative providers?
- What alternative ways can the Council provide the service?
- Can demand for services be managed differently?

Tenants are advised of the rules of the tenancy at the sign up process and information is also available in the Tenants Handbook. Information regarding the sign up process and the policy (including a ‘Quick guide to the Pets Policy’) is published on the website and featured in the tenants magazine Housing Matters.

6 Action plan

- Actions to mitigate adverse impact, improve equality of opportunity or foster good relations and/or obtain new evidence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Lead</th>
<th>Deadline or review date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To publish the revised policy</td>
<td>Business Development Officer</td>
<td>May 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitor Complaints to identify any negative</td>
<td>Housing Finance</td>
<td>May 2019</td>
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7 Recommendation
The recommendation by the lead officer should be stated below. This may be:
- to proceed with the change, implementing the Action Plan if appropriate
- consider alternatives
- gather further evidence
If the recommendation is to proceed with the change and there are no actions that can be taken to mitigate likely adverse impact, it is important to state why.
To proceed with the implementation of the revised policy.

8 Authorisation
The authorising officer is consenting that:
- the recommendation can be implemented
- sufficient evidence has been obtained and appropriate mitigation is planned
- the Action Plan will be incorporated into the relevant Service Plan and monitored

Authorising Officer
Marc Blowers
Head of Housing Management

Date

Contact your Performance and Intelligence hub for advice on completing this assessment
RCC: phone 2443 email: annamaris.lawrence@medway.gov.uk
C&A: (Children's Social Care) phone 4013 email: chrismckenzio@medway.gov.uk
C&A (all other areas): phone 2472/1490 email: corpi@medway.gov.uk
BH: phone 2636 email: david.wilting@medway.gov.uk
Send completed assessment to the Corporate Performance & Intelligence Hub (CPI) for web publication (corpi@medway.gov.uk)