
Policy: Pets

Updated January 2014

This policy was established following a thorough review of the issue of clients having pets and following a consultation exercise with clients which took place October – December 2013

Background

During the review Transform staff were mindful of the various arguments in support of allowing clients to have pets. For example the benefits to people who may be lonely and isolated of having an animal have been frequently quoted. It was also noted that there is an argument of 'natural justice' (i.e., giving Transform's clients the same rights as other people) and that a client living alone might feel safer in their home if they had a dog.

Conversely the arguments against allowing clients to have pets were also noted. For example, as Transform's clients are all in need of supported accommodation themselves they may not be able to take on the additional responsibility of an animal, including the financial responsibility if their only income is by way of welfare benefits. There may be problems in ensuring an animal was properly cared for if a client suddenly moved out of Transform accommodation (e.g. because of being admitted to hospital) or was suddenly unable to cope (e.g. because of a deterioration in their mental health). Other issues that were considered were the practical ones of noise, damage to property, dirt, fleas and smell, particularly as many Transform properties are shared. The feelings of other clients in shared accommodation were also considered, and the fact that some clients, current or future, may be allergic to certain kinds of animals, or may suffer from asthma.

The Policy

External constraints:

Where a property is managed on behalf of another organisation or is leased or rented, the stipulations in the agreement from the other organisation will need to be observed. Where the agreement stipulates that no pets are permitted then Transform must abide by this.

Official Service dogs:

Where a client has a specific need or disability which might be assisted by an officially trained service dog then this will be considered as long as it does not contravene any external constraints. Examples of service dogs which might be considered include:

- Guide dogs
- Seizure response dogs
- Dogs for the disabled / mobility dogs
- Hearing dogs

Shared accommodation:

In shared accommodation clients will generally not be permitted to keep pets although in some circumstances it may be possible for them to have a small pet such as a small caged bird, a small caged animal such as a hamster (no more than two) or fish. Roaming animals (e.g. cats or dogs) will not be considered in shared accommodation.

Any client in shared accommodation should first discuss their plans to acquire such pets with their key worker who will seek the approval of the Project Manager or Supported Housing Manager. Permission must be obtained *before* acquiring the pet.

Self-contained accommodation:

Where clients live in self-contained accommodation, they might be allowed to keep pets. However clients must always receive permission before acquiring any sort of animal. If the pet is a fish or a small, caged animal which is not roaming, then permission must be sought from the Project Manager or Supported Housing Manager. If the pet is larger or roaming (such as a cat, dog, rabbit etc.) then this will require the permission of the Area Manager. Requests should be made in writing to the Area Manager, together with recommendations from project staff involved, stating the case for a pet. The Area Manager will give a decision within two weeks, based on the following grounds.

- The size and nature of the animal relative to the accommodation and garden.
- The ability of the client to adequately care for the animal and finance food, veterinary bills and other costs.
- Potential nuisance factor to others, possible damage, smells or hygiene problems.
- Any other factors that are relevant at the time (e.g. proximity of accommodation to a busy road).
- Roaming animals will not be considered in short-term accommodation (i.e. accommodation where the anticipated length of stay is under 2 years).

Permission must be obtained *before* acquiring the pet and the Area Manager's decision is final.

Responsibilities:

Where permission is granted for a client to keep a pet, then the client must assume full responsibility for the well-being and behaviour of their pet, including:

- Ensuring the pet is properly fed and cared for

- Ensuring the pet's behaviour does not negatively impact on others (e.g. noise, smell, hygiene etc.)
- Ensuring the pet does not cause damage to the property and, where damage is caused, paying for repairs.

In addition, Transform would encourage owners of dogs or cats to have their pet spayed / neutered.

Neglect or mistreatment of pets:

If any member of staff feels that a client is neglecting or mistreating an animal in their care, the Area Manager should be notified and the matter reported to the appropriate animal welfare agency at the earliest opportunity (e.g., RSPCA, RSPB).

Non-compliance:

Non-compliance with this policy may lead to eviction procedures being taken under the terms of Transform's licence or tenancy agreement.