

HSP 08 Bringing pets into the home

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1. Introduction

The presence of pets in an Elizabeth Finn care home can be of a real benefit and in most cases provide companionship, comfort and offer a way of making contact with others. Some pets, however can also pose a risk. Disease can be acquired through contact with animals especially if a person's immunity is reduced.

This procedure provides guidance for Managers when considering whether the care home can accommodate a permanent pet. It also provides guidance for the ongoing care of those pets that are accommodated.

2. What the Regulations require?

Under health and safety law, all employers have a duty of care to make their workplace safe for their employees, residents and the public. It is considered good practice to produce a risk assessment for all permanent pets introduced into the home.

The risk assessment will help you identify simple controls that can be put in place – for example you should consider the risk of someone being bitten. While it is impossible to say that this will never happen, the risk should be low as long as you put effective measures in place. In this instance, you can speak to the owner before they move in and find out whether the dog has ever shown signs of aggression. If they have, you can either decline admission or insist that the dog wears a muzzle in communal areas of the home.

3. Visiting animals & infection control measures

Visitors with dogs are expected to have dogs on a lead and under control at all times. The following general precautions should be followed:

- Do not allow animals to lick residents or staff
- Cover any cuts or wounds with a waterproof dressing.
- Clean bites / scratches immediately and if necessary seek medical advice.
- Pets are not allowed into food preparation areas.

Various organisations arrange to bring pets into care homes eg Pets as therapy (PAT). These pets are assessed for temperament to ensure cat or dog is sociable, friendly and calm and also have to produce a pet's vaccination certificate. The Social Events Coordinator will check this documentation when appointment is made.

4. The Process for assessing permanent pets

- Request for accommodating a pet is forwarded and dealt with by the homes' General Manager.
- General Manager carries out initial suitability assessment. Pets suitable for accommodation within our homes are identified.
- Documented risk assessment is completed for pets to be accommodated and decision is communicated to residents.
- A trial period of 1 month commences with pet in the home. During this time the suitability of pet within the home is reviewed.

5. Infections associated with animals

Animal	Salmonella	Other Diseases
Dogs & Cats	✓	Campylobacter, Toxocara, Toxoplasma
Tropical fish	✓	Streptococcus, Aeromonas, Mycobacterium
Birds		Chlamydia psittaci
Exotic pets – Snakes, Lizards, Terrapins	✓	
Ponies, horses, donkeys	✓	Ringworm

Taking sensible precautions will reduce the risk to an acceptable level.

Fish tanks

Fish tanks can pose an infection hazard if not properly managed therefore, a maintenance contract with an aquaria maintenance specialist must be established.

- Tanks should be kept sealed and located in a communal area.
- Residents and visitors should not have direct access to the water as it may be heavily contaminated with microorganisms.
- Fish food is also frequently contaminated with pathogenic micro-organisms therefore hands must be washed thoroughly after handling fish food.

6. Initial suitability assessment

Normally the request to bring a pet into the care home will be considered at the time of resident's pre-assessment. There may also be situations where subsequent requests are received from residents or members of staff. Depending on the type of pet / situation being considered this decision may be very straightforward. Other situations may be more complex and require additional expertise and advice.

In helping to form an initial decision the General Manager should obtain the following basic information regarding the pet.

- Temperament of animal – any signs of aggressive / protective nature.
- Feeding routine – any unique diet requirements (eg raw food).
- Sleeping habits
- Exercise routine
- Veterinary checks
- History of worming and flea prevention measures
- Any Pet insurance held
- What is to happen to pet if it dies
- Arrangements for pet if owner dies first

General Managers must satisfy themselves that the introduction of a pet into the home is acceptable to both existing residents and staff.

7. Assessing the risk

To adequately manage the risk to the residents and staff a pet risk assessment must be completed (Appendix 1 – Pet risk assessment)

In general terms, Elizabeth Finn care homes can only accommodate small household pets only. The home cannot accept large pets, exotic species or animals requiring substantial support from care staff.

Elizabeth Finn care homes only allow domestic pets and do not allow pets that are listed under current legislation as prohibited. The Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 lists the four types of dog Pit Bull Terrier, Japanese Tosa, Dogo Argentino and Fila Brasileiro. These breeds will not be accepted as pets within our care homes.

The RSPCA have identified the following breeds as showing a tendency and capacity for aggressiveness; Alsatian / German Shepherd, Dobermans, Rottweilers, and Rhodesian Ridgebacks

8. Review of risk assessment

The placement of the pet within the care home should be reviewed after 1 month to ensure no issues are arising. An understanding and agreement should be made with the pet owner that the pet may have to be removed from the home if it has a negative impact on other residents or staff. The General Manager has the final say regarding the accommodation of the pet.

9. General advice on controls

The health and well-being of residents and staff must take precedence when considering the accommodation of a pet – for example if a resident / member of staff is allergic to cat or dog hair and the animal cannot be kept away from that person that the pet cannot be accommodated.

- **Access** – You may wish to ask dog owners to use a side entrance so that they can avoid busy communal areas of the building such as the reception area. You will also want to decide which areas of the care home you will allow dogs access to. If you decide to allow dogs in communal areas such as a lounge, it would be advisable to ensure that all residents are aware of this arrangement.
- **Rooms** - Decide how many pets you will accept and which rooms you will locate them in. Ideally dog rooms should be on the ground floor with easy access to the outside space. It's a good idea to minimise the number of dogs to reduce barking. It's advisable to put up clear signs on the doors of dog rooms so that all staff and residents are aware that a dog may be inside and to take care when entering the room.
- **Allergies to pets** – If staff or residents are allergic to cat dog hair, you would need to ensure that the dog rooms are regularly cleaned and ask the owner to regularly groom their pet. This will reduce the amount of hair in the home, which is often the cause of allergies. You could also limit the areas that pets are allowed in, for example keeping dogs away from communal areas.
- **Fear of pets** - If staff or residents are afraid of any type of animal, you can limit their contact with the pet living in the home. Ask dog owners to keep their dogs on a lead and under control at all times while inside the home. You can also ensure that pets are not allowed in staff or communal areas.

10. Ensuring the pet's wellbeing

The welfare of the pets that live in the care home is important and we expect the following things from responsible pet owners:

- Ensure that the pet does not cause a nuisance or disturbance to others
- Regular worming and flea prevention measures
- Registration of pet at a vets
- Pet identification
- Alternative arrangements should the resident go to hospital or be unable to look after the pet.
- Pet insurance

11. Hygiene implications

It is important to consider the hygiene implications of allowing pets within the home.

- **Illness** - Some diseases and illnesses that are common in dogs & cats can be transmitted to humans. This is more likely in people who have a compromised immune system but it is important to take steps to prevent this. Ensure all dogs & cats in the care home are regularly treated for fleas and worms and vaccinated annually. Any pets showing signs of illness should see a vet for advice or treatment.
- **Fouling** – Most dogs should be toilet trained so fouling inside the home should not be a problem. However, you should make dog owners aware that it is their responsibility to clean up after their dogs. Dog owners should bag the dog poo securely and dispose of it in a normal waste bin.
- **Food Preparation Areas** – Pets should not be allowed into any area where food is prepared, handled or stored for commercial purposes, such as the kitchen or food store room. Dogs are allowed in areas where food is served so you can allow dogs into your dining room if you wish – but this should be locally assessed. However, it's advisable to keep dogs that are unwell away from areas where food is served until they are fully recovered.
There are potential risks associated with feeding raw meat based diets. Raw meat can contain both parasites and bacteria which can cause *E.coli*, *Salmonella* and *Listeria* which can be infectious and dangerous to humans. These bacteria are not destroyed by freezing. Any raw meat diets need to be very carefully assessed.

12. Record keeping

Records of the pet assessment should be kept on file during the time the pet is still resident within the home. The assessment should be reviewed if significant changes in either the pet's behaviour or the owners ability to look after the pet occurs.

The resident care plan of the pet owner should reference keeping of the pet.

13. Associated documents

- HSP08A Pet Risk Assessment
- iCare Environment Risk Assessment (Form 5.10)

14. A Summary of the main points

Check that:

- Before accepting a pet into the home the General Manager confirms that a risk assessment (Appendix 1) has been completed.
- General Manager ensures that staff and other resident's feelings / concerns are taken into consideration before admission of a pet.
- Residents sign agreement on care of pets (Appendix 2)
- Care plan of resident includes reference to pet.

15. Document history

Author	Steve Andrews (Health & Safety Manager)
Date of Implementation	08/02/2017
Date of next full review	01/01/2027

Issue	Date	Author	Reason
1.0	08/02/2017	Steve Andrews	New document created – HSP 08.
2.0	10/01/2018	Steve Andrews	Full document review – no changes.
2.1	08/02/2018	Steve Andrews	Added advice on risks relating to raw meat diet for dogs.
3.0	07/01/2021	Steve Andrews	Full document review – no changes
4.0	13/07/2023	Steve Andrews	Added section to include Infection Control implications
5.0	21/01/2024	Steve Andrews	Full document review – added section to reference associated documents (Section 13). Created standalone risk assessment.
5.0	24/02/2024	Steve Andrews	Banner updated, no other changes, issue number kept same.