

1 Scope

- 1.1 Aster recognises the importance of pets for households; in terms of companionship, improving wellbeing (both physical and mental), and bringing joy and comfort to customers.
- 1.2 We also recognise that reported nuisance from pets is a issue that significantly impacts on our ability to manage our homes, estates, and communities.
- 1.3 The aims of the policy are to:
 - provide clear and consistent advice for potential and current pet owners about when it is, and is not, acceptable to keep pets.
 - Encourage responsible pet ownership amongst customers.
 - Minimise any issues or complaints relating to animals within Aster owned/managed properties.
- 1.4 This policy applies to all tenants, leaseholders, shared owners, and their household members, of domestic properties owned or managed by Aster.
- 1.5 Pets that are visitors will be treated as being the responsibility of the customer for the purposes of this policy.
- 1.6 The tenancy agreement or lease may include a clause regarding pet ownership. This should always be considered alongside this policy.

Definitions

- 1.7 Aster defines a pet as a domesticated animal that is kept for companionship. This does not include livestock, although we will consider requests for adequately housed rabbits or chickens.
- 1.8 We consider 'caged pets' to be any small animal that is kept in a cage, tank, hutch, or vivarium; such as reptiles, birds, small mammals, or invertebrates. This includes fish in a pond
- 1.9 We define an assistance animal as one which has been specifically trained to assist disabled people, and which has been qualified by one of the organisations registered as a member of Assistance Dogs (UK) or an equivalent organisation in another country. Examples may include guide dogs, hearing dogs, or seizure alert dogs

Pests

- 1.10 We recognise pets can be linked to pest infestations and have developed a guidance note to give practical advice for staff dealing with complaints of pest infestation.
- 1.11 We expect pet-owning customers to be mindful of how they could avoid attracting pests, for example not leaving food outside or not regularly cleaning outdoor hutches or cages.
- 1.12 Where we can evidence a customer's pet has caused a pest infestation, we would hold them responsible for remedying the issue, and any costs associated with this.
- 1.13 Dog mess must be cleaned up immediately.

2 Policy Statement

- 2.1 We will consider any permission request to keep a pet and not refuse permission unreasonably.
- 2.2 There are certain times when we will refuse permission to keep a pet. These could include:
- If the animal is banned or the dog breed is considered dangerous (as per the Dangerous Dogs act 1991/7)
 - If a customer is in serious breach of their tenancy
 - If there previously has been anti-social behaviour or nuisance by the customer/members of their household
 - If the customer requires a cat-flap to be installed in a fire door or PVCU door
 - If there is concern that the customer will be unable to meet the duty of care required under Section 9 of the Animal Welfare Act
 - If the property is unsuitable for the type of pet requested
- 2.3 If a customer is in rent arrears with no payment plan in place, we would not normally grant permission for a pet. This is because we would have concerns about the affordability of a pet and managing the associated costs of responsible pet ownership. We can review this decision once the arrears have been addressed and/ or a payment plan has been kept to for an agreed period.
- 2.4 If there is reason to believe that a pet will be used for breeding/commercial purposes, we may not grant, or would remove, permission unless we are satisfied the welfare of the animal is adequate. We may need to grant additional permission for this in line with our 'Business at Home Procedure'.
- 2.5 We will grant permission for assistance animals provided there is sufficient supporting documentation and the property is suitable. If the property is unsuitable, we will consider supporting or signposting the customer with a move to a more suitable home. We may carry out occupational therapist referrals if required to see if any adjustments need to be made.
- 2.6 We would not normally grant permission for an outdoor pet such as a cat or dog if the property shares a communal entrance into a shared internal area, for example a block of flats or Housing for Older People. This includes visitors bringing pets to the property.
- 2.7 Permissions for housecats (that do not leave the customer's home) will only be granted if pet waste is disposed of responsibly.
- 2.8 We will allow a reasonable number of caged pets in homes where we wouldn't normally allow cats or dogs.
- 2.9 We will consider not allowing pet permissions beyond a maximum number of pets per home. This number will be set by property size and type, as well as the type of animals kept as pet, and would not normally exceed either 2 cats or 2 dogs.
- 2.10 Permission granted should state if the permission is for a specific pet, or any pets within the property. Further information on the pet e.g. name, breed etc. may be required.
- 2.11 Pet permissions should always be confirmed, in writing, by the Neighbourhood Officer/Assistant, Independent Living Officer, or Home Ownership Team, at signup if the request is received prior to moving into an Aster home, or through MyAster Portal.

- 2.12 Aster will consider tenancy enforcement where it is reasonable and proportionate to do so. When a customer is found to have a pet and does not have permission, Aster will work with the customer to ensure they are compliant with their tenancy; and consider if granting retrospective permission is appropriate.
- 2.13 Dog owners should fully comply with the Code of Practice for the welfare of Dogs- https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/697953/pb13333-cop-dogs-091204.pdf and cat owners should fully comply with the Code of Practice for the welfare of Cats - https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/697941/pb13332-cop-cats-091204.pdf
- 2.14 If a customer has been granted written permission for a pet prior to the implementation of this policy, we will allow permission to continue for the current pet/s.
- 2.15 We will not tolerate any nuisance caused by pets and will follow our policies and procedures in managing any complaints received. Anything considered statutory nuisance should be referred to the Local Authority to lead on investigations and/or enforcement.
- 2.16 Things we consider to be nuisance include:
- Dogs barking incessantly (one-off instances or short periods of barking would not be considered nuisance.)
 - Attacks on other people or animals
 - Dog mess not being cleaned up by the owner
 - Pets not being kept under control (including being on a lead in communal areas & gardens when being exercised)
 - Pets causing damage to a property, possessions, or garden
- 2.17 We recognise cats are roaming animals and do not consider them entering or messing in gardens to be a nuisance. We would expect customers to find their own amicable resolution if they are having an issue with a neighbour's cat.
- 2.18 We can withdraw any permission granted if pets are causing a nuisance.
- 2.19 Any customer (including their visitor/s) who is found to be mistreating/abusing an animal will have permission to keep a pet removed immediately and reported to the RSPCA.
- 2.20 We will work with RSPCA or any partner agency with concerns about pet welfare.
- 2.21 We will hold customers responsible for any damage caused by their (or their visitors') pets and will follow our Recharge Policy to recover any costs for repairs or cleaning that are because of pet damage. This would include damage caused by fitting a cat flap to a door
- 2.22 Customers in rented homes wouldn't be allowed to bury a dead pet in their garden/communal area under any circumstances.
- 2.23 We will make it clear when we advertise homes for letting if they are suitable for pets or not.
- 2.24 If a customer wants to mutual exchange into a property where pets are not allowed, we will refuse the exchange if they are not willing to rehome their pet.

- 2.25 We will take individual circumstances into account and apply case by case discretion when implementing this policy, and consider the nature of property, any current or previous complaints, and the customer's circumstances.
- 2.26 Roles and responsibilities will include Independent Living Officers, Neighbourhood Officers and Assistants, Lettings Coordinators, Home Ownership Team, ASB Officers, EBHT staff members, surveyors, and trades operatives.
- 2.27 Any complaints regarding the implementation of this policy will be dealt with in line with our Complaints Policy and process.

3 Monitoring and Review

- 3.1 We can monitor number of households with pets, including number of permissions granted/refused and can report on any trends.
- 3.2 We can report on workflows to ensure process is being followed correctly, including spot checks and/or audits.
- 3.3 We will monitor any Customer satisfaction surveys including STAR and SNAP surveys.
- 3.4 We will ensure effective implementation of this policy by publishing on the Aster website and on our intranet Asternet. We will ensure policy overview sessions are held for teams that will be responsible for implementing the policy, and make these sessions available for any new colleagues or refreshers.
- 3.5 We will monitor attendance of these sessions, and of colleagues who have confirmed having read the document through Asternet, 6 months post-implementation.
- 3.6 The effectiveness of this policy will be continuously monitored, and the embedding of the policy scrutinised after 12 months by the *Customer Experience Panel*.
- 3.7 This policy will be reviewed every 3 years unless business need, regulation or legislation prompts an early review.

4 Related Policies and Procedures

- 4.1 Guidance note for pest infestations – tenanted properties.
- 4.2 Lettings Policy
- 4.3 Lettings Procedure
- 4.4 Anti-Social Behaviour Policy
- 4.5 Tenancy Policy
- 4.6 Estate Management Policy
- 4.7 Diversity & Inclusion Policy
- 4.8 Honesty Policy
- 4.9 Recharges Policy
- 4.10 Mutual Exchange Procedure
- 4.11 Business at Home Procedure

5 Governance			
Effective From:	19/07/2021	Expires:	18/07/2024
Policy Owner:	Regional Director – Dorset, Somerset, Devon & Cornwall		
Policy Author:	Policy & Assurance Officer		
Approved by:	<i>Customer Overview Group</i>		
Delegation Matrix Reference:	R0100	Version Number:	V1.0