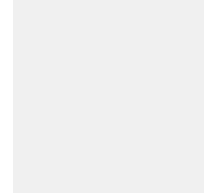


Household Pets



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1. Introduction

The Local Authority has a duty to ensure that when children become looked after, they are placed within a substitute care environment which meets their needs and safeguards their welfare.

Within this context, the Local Authority is content for prospective foster and adoptive carers to have household pets, in recognition of the fact that pets can make a positive contribution to family life and have an impact upon the experience of children and young people living in substitute care.

The presence of a pet may however, also raise concerns for the welfare of a child and careful consideration will need to be given to any potential risks they may pose during the assessment period. This does not only apply to dogs but also to potential carers who own pets such as spiders, snakes, other reptiles and exotic pets.

2. Legislative Framework

Under the provisions of the Care Standards Act 2000, the Fostering Services Regulations 2011, the Fostering Services National Minimum Standards, and the Adoption National Standards, the Local Authority is required to ensure that the Family Placements Service promotes and safeguards the child/young person's physical, mental and emotional welfare.

Any household pet that could be perceived as potentially dangerous or harmful to a child or young person in placement must therefore be subject to an assessment of "risk". Their presence in the household must form part of the matching considerations when making either an emergency or

planned placement with a foster carer and in proposing a “match” to the Adoption or Fostering Panel.

In these circumstances, the Local Authority must also be mindful of the provisions of the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 which prohibits the possession of some breeds of dog and includes the names of other types on a list of those that are considered dangerous.

3. Principles

The presence of household pets within the home of a potential foster or adoptive carer will not automatically preclude approval, although the paramount consideration of the social worker undertaking the assessment is to ensure that the carers are able to meet the needs of any child or young person placed with them. This includes their ability to recognise any potential risks their pet may pose and what arrangements can be put in place to safeguard those living in or visiting their home.

The Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 includes the following types on the list of dangerous dogs:

- The Pit Bull Terrier
- The Japanese Tosa
- The Dogo Argentino and
- The Fila Brasileiro

It is an offence to own or keep any of the above types of dog unless they are included on the Index of Exempted Dogs and comply with the requirements of the index i.e. they must be neutered, tattooed and micro chipped and must be muzzled and on a lead when in a public place. Only a Court can direct that a dog be included on the index of exempted dogs.

Applicants who own a type of dog which is included on the dangerous dogs list will always be asked to undertake an assessment.

In addition to the issue of dogs, the presence of other pets may raise concerns for the welfare of a child. For example:

- A child may be allergic to the pet
- The pet may carry infections to which children are susceptible
- Hygiene issues may arise from the presence a pet e.g. a puppy who is not house trained or cat litter within the house
- Fear of attack
- Phobias/fear of certain pets EG spiders

Failure to take account of any potential risk or hazard posed by a household pet could lead to distress or injury to a child in placement. This in turn may expose the Local Authority to possible

legal action by the parent or the child themselves. Thus, this matter must be treated seriously during the assessment

4. Procedure

All enquiries from members of the public who express an interest in becoming foster or adoptive carers will initially be dealt with by the duty social worker in the family placement service.

Responses to general enquiries will be dealt with according to the current service recruitment targets. (See Recruitment of Substitute Carers for Looked After Children and Young People Policy and the associated guidance)

When taking these enquiries, the duty officer will obtain details of any household pets that the potential carer may have and will make particular note if any of them may pose a possible risk either to children placed in their care **or** to the social worker undertaking the initial home visit if this is considered appropriate.

Please note that the issue of potential risk to staff will need to be discussed with the Team Manager and may be included as part of the Single Assessment

During the Single Assessment visit, the social worker will discuss the applicant's motivation, experience and suitability for the fostering/ adoption task. At the end of the visit, they should make a full record of their Single Assessment and make a clear recommendation to the relevant Team Manager (Please refer to the Single Assessment pro-forma). During the visit, the applicant should be informed of any concerns that may require further exploration or preclude their application from proceeding. This may include issues in relation to pets which could pose a risk or health hazard.

In circumstances where the applicant has the necessary skills and experience to provide a valuable resource to the service, but there are issues in respect of their household pets, consideration should be given to the arrangements that have been made for safeguarding people, including children, from the attentions of the relevant animal and should be recorded.

Special consideration will have to be given in the case of households such as farms, or where occupations or pastimes are relevant, as in the case of boarding kennels and breeders.

A vet's assessment may be needed if:

- Prospective foster or adoptive carers who own any animal which the assessing social worker feels requires a risk assessment
- An existing foster carer obtains a large dog or exotic pet
- Any pet/animal owned by a prospective adoptive or foster carer or by an existing foster carer which displays aggressive, excitable or unruly behaviour
- An existing foster carer, or prospective foster or adoptive carer owns any other pet which may pose unknown risks or hazards to a child in placement.
- Foster Carers will be routinely asked to undertake a risk assessment for their pet

If a vet's assessment is considered necessary, this will be discussed with the relevant Team Manager who will make a decision or seek further advice on how to proceed.