

HSHAWB 17 Dogs Trust

Senedd Cymru | Welsh Parliament

Y Pwyllgor Llywodraeth Leol a Thai | Local Government and Housing Committee

Bil Digartrefedd a Dyrannu Tai Cymdeithasol (Cymru) | Homelessness and Social Housing Allocation (Wales) Bill

Ymateb gan: Dogs Trust | Evidence from: Dogs Trust

Dogs Trust response to the Local Government and Housing Committee's consultation on the Homelessness and Social Housing Allocation (Wales) Bill.

About Dogs Trust

Dogs Trust is the UK's largest dog welfare charity; we care for more than 14,000 dogs over an average year and in Wales, we look after around 1,200 dogs in an average year. We welcome the opportunity to work with the Local Government and Housing Committee to scrutinise the Homelessness and Social Housing Allocation (Wales) Bill. The information enclosed in this response provides an overview of the changes that could be made to improve dog and human welfare within the Homelessness and Social Housing Allocation (Wales) Bill.

Q1: What are your views on the general principles of the Bill, and whether there is a need for legislation to deliver the stated policy intention?

Dogs Trust welcomes the Homelessness and Social Housing Allocation (Wales) Bill, as it places a stronger emphasis on homelessness prevention. These measures may, indirectly, benefit pet owners who are threatened with, or experiencing, homelessness in Wales.

Dogs Trust supports those at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness through our Together Through

Homelessness (TTH) project. This project provides free veterinary care, advice and support. Through TTH, we have seen the detrimental impact of homelessness on pet owners. Many struggle to access safe and secure accommodation.

Unfortunately, some of our clients have been forced to make the heart-breaking decision to relinquish their pet to find a safe place to call home. As a result, Dogs Trust welcomes the principle of the Bill to place a stronger emphasis on homelessness prevention and remove barriers which have historically served to exclude people from assistance.

Dogs Trust also welcomes the broadening of the Welsh Government's definition of domestic abuse by recognising controlling or coercive behaviour, economic and psychological abuse. Dogs Trust also operates a confidential fostering service for those seeking to flee domestic abuse, called Freedom. Through Freedom, we have seen how pets can often be used as a tool by the perpetrator, with many using threats to the animal to coerce and control their partner.¹ In many cases threats to the pet are used to stop the victim-survivor from leaving, so we know how important it is for victim-survivors to get their pets to safety too at the point of leaving. The Home Office's statutory guidance, which relates to the 2021 Act includes abuse directed at pets under examples of abuse. As such, we hope that through this Bill, more support will be provided for pet owners seeking to flee domestic abuse.^{2 3}

Q2: What are your views on the provisions set out in Part 1 of the Bill - Homelessness (sections 1 -34)? In particular, are the provisions workable and will they deliver the stated policy intention?

Dogs Trust welcomes the provisions as set out in Part one of the Bill especially regarding the Government's plan to place a stronger emphasis on homelessness prevention and to broaden its definition of domestic abuse. As outlined above we believe these changes will ensure that more barriers to assistance are removed, including for pet owners.

However, there are areas where we would like to see the Bill strengthened. The Housing (Wales) Act

2014 states that the Section 73 and 75 duties can end if an individual refuses an offer of accommodation, which the authority is satisfied is suitable for the applicant. Unfortunately, we know that many pet owners are offered accommodation which is unsuitable for them and their pet(s). Through the delivery of our homelessness support services, we have seen many cases of pet owners who are experiencing homelessness that would rather remain homeless than give up their pet as they do not want to lose a loved member of the family or, in many cases, their only companion. We would like to see the Homelessness and Social Housing Allocation (Wales) Bill strengthened, to ensure that local

¹ B.Jegatheesan, et al. (2020) Understanding the Link between Animal Cruelty and Family Violence: The Bioecological Systems Model. Available at:

[https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7246522/#:~:text=The%20authors%20found%20that%20animals,by%20a%20parent\(s\)](https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7246522/#:~:text=The%20authors%20found%20that%20animals,by%20a%20parent(s))

² Home Office (2022) Domestic Abuse Statutory Guidance. Available at:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/62c6df068fa8f54e855dfe31/Domestic_Abuse_Act_2021_Statutory_Guidance.pdf

authorities cannot discharge their Section 73 and 75 duties to an applicant if they refuse an offer of accommodation which isn't suitable for their pets.

Additionally, Dogs Trust would like to see the legislation strengthened in relation to Section 33 of the Bill to ensure that pet owners aren't unduly refused accommodation just because they have a pet. The section enables a local housing authority to request a social landlord to provide accommodation for a homeless person, which a social landlord can refuse – only if there is a good reason. We would like to see provisions within the Bill and guidance produced by the Welsh Government to address the issue of social landlords unreasonably refusing pets. Within the new guidance we would like to see the following grounds used as examples of unreasonable grounds for refusal:

- Housing provider's opinion about pets, specific species or breeds,
- Fear of damage and any form of anti-social behaviour such as noise or fouling,
- Experience with a previous contract holder,
- Assuming pets are unsuitable for certain property types, like flats or shared housing, without assessing the pet's needs or how the tenant intends to meet them.
- Generalised claims or unsubstantiated animal welfare concerns.

We would also like to see the publication of guidance for dogs exempted under Section One of the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 – on accessing socially rented accommodation.³ Accessing accommodation as a pet owner already comes with significant barriers. These barriers can be further exacerbated for those who own a dog that is exempted under the Dangerous Dogs Act.

However, in their case, the options available to them are radically reduced. Either, they find suitable accommodation, or their loving companion will need to be put to sleep, as they are unable to rehome or transfer the ownership of their dog under the legislation. This is despite the owners of exempted dogs needing to comply with the various requirements such as having third-party insurance and ensuring that the dog is neutered, and muzzle trained. As owners of exempted dogs are already complying with the legislation, they are showing that they are responsible dog owners and shouldn't be refused accommodation just because of the breed/type of their dog. Therefore, we would like to see the Welsh Government issue guidance that ensures social landlords cannot refuse consent

³ HM Government (1991) Dangerous Dogs Act 1991. Available at: [Dangerous Dogs Act 1991](#)

for a dog to be kept based on its status as exempted under Section One of the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991.⁴

Q5: What are the potential barriers to the implementation of the Bill's provisions and how does the Bill take account of them?

Dogs Trust is concerned that, without an increase in resources and sustainable funding for homelessness prevention teams, local authorities may be at risk of breaching of the legislation, as they are under-resourced to deliver the positive policy changes that the legislation outlines. Therefore, we would like to see a sustainable funding plan for local authorities. This would enable them to deliver

⁴ HM Government (1991) Dangerous Dogs Act 1991. Available at: [Dangerous Dogs Act 1991](#)

the changes that are required to ensure that Wales leads the way on pet-friendly housing, regardless of where someone may be in their housing journey.