

Pets Policy

DESIGN HEADER TO INCLUDE POLICY NAME AND DATE RANGE

INFORMATION

Policy Name	Pets Policy
Effective Date(s)	May 2024
Approved By	Risk and Compliance Group, Customer Services Committee
Approval Date	09 May 2024
Policy Owner/Dept	Exec Director of Housing and Customer
Policy Author	Head of Customer Voice & Insight
Review Date	May 2027
Version Number	V1

Version Control

Version	Date	Changes	Approver

Your Housing Group Strategic Priorities

Safe	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Viability	<input type="checkbox"/>
Landlord	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Growth	<input type="checkbox"/>
People	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Technology	<input type="checkbox"/>

Relevant National Standards or Regulation

Please State if the Policy aligns to any of the Regulators Standards:

- Safety & Quality Standard
- Tenancy Standard
- Neighbourhood and Community Standard

Relevant Legislation

- Housing Act 2004
- Health and Safety at Work Act 1974
- The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999
- Animal Welfare Act 2006
- Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 • The Dangerous Dogs (Designated Types) (England and Wales) Order 2023 • Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976 • Environmental Protection Act 1990 • Control of Dogs Order 1992 • Microchipping of Dogs (England) Regulations 2015 • Equality Act 2010
--	--

1. Purpose of the Policy

This Policy will aim to provide clarity on Your Housing Group’s (YHG) approach to the management of pets living within our homes. Our aim is to ensure that we encourage responsible pet ownership that mitigates nuisance caused to other residents and protects animals against cruelty. We also aim to ensure that pets are accommodated by considering the suitability of our existing housing stock.

As an inclusive landlord with customers at the heart of everything we do, YHG promotes responsible pet ownership. Pets can be a critical support to our customers and assist in their general wellbeing, and physical and mental health but the responsible management of such is integral to providing the appropriate support to our customers, particularly in communal living settings. However, we must also ensure that property condition is not affected adversely, and other customers are not affected negatively by some residents keeping pets. We also have a duty to protect customers, colleagues, contractors, and other visitors / stakeholders who visit our homes and neighbourhoods, from exposure to situations which may pose a hazard to their health and safety.

The Pets Policy will balance the requirements of legislation and guidance with maximising the opportunities for residents to enjoy their pets in their homes and within our neighbourhoods. This policy clearly outlines where permission to keep a pet will and will not be required, and the instances where permission will not be granted and those instances when it may be withdrawn.

The policy aims to provide clarity for customers, visitors and YHG employees regarding YHG’s approach towards pet ownership within our homes.

2. Scope of the Policy

The Policy applies to all tenants, leaseholders, licensees, employees, contractors, and anyone living in or visiting homes within our management and ownership. The customers it relates to may be living in general needs, supported, sheltered or extra care accommodation. The policy also applies to any visitors to our customers’ homes or our schemes.

The Pets Policy gives clear direction on the ownership of pets and allows them to be cared for responsibly, whilst at the same time safeguarding our customers, colleagues (including contractors working on our behalf) and any visitors and protecting them from risk.

YHG's priority is to keep everyone safe and this policy details exactly how we do this, whilst still promoting responsible pet ownership.

Legislative change around XL Bully Type Dogs has been a key driver in developing this policy and as a result, there is a prominent focus on our approach to the management of these dogs contained within the policy. This is a key part of policy scoping.

YHG are also keen to bring consistent approach to the management of pet ownership and where possible, within our customers' homes and neighbourhoods.

YHG have also paid due consideration to legislation around pet ownership and have not attempted to breach any legislation during the development of this policy.

Also considered as part of the scope has been our approach to building safety and the evacuation procedures within our buildings. Our Policy has been developed ensuring building safety and indeed or evacuation procedures are not adversely affected.

Detailed within this policy is YHG's approach to the following:-

- Permission and notification.
- Pets not permitted within our homes.
- XL Bully Types and dangerous dogs.
- Keeping our customers safe.
- Keeping our colleagues safe.
- Communal areas and shared facilities.
- Community Centres & Playgrounds.
- Tenancy agreements and leases.
- Pet owner responsibilities.
- Nuisance.
- Enforcement.
- Taking enforcement action.

YHG promotes responsible pet ownership and as a result any banning or prohibition of pets within our buildings has not been considered as part of the scope. Exceptions to this is where the tenancy agreement or lease prevents us from doing so. More information can be found in section 6 of this policy.

This policy should be read in conjunction with our Anti-Social Behaviour and Hate Crime Policy and our Complaints Policy.

3. Definitions

- **Dangerous Dogs** – Dogs that are defined as such by the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 (including the 2023 Amendment concerning XL Bully Types).
- **XL Bully Types** – XL Bully Types can refer to a range of cross bred dogs, generally defined within the legislation as “Large dog with a muscular body and blocky head, suggesting great strength and power for its size. Powerfully built individual.”
- **Domestic Pets** – Defined as tamed animals that can typically live in a domestic setting and not likely to cause issues, if cared for appropriately. Examples of domestic pets include (but not limited to) dogs, cats, rodents, small birds, and fish.
- **Exotic Pets** - Defined as any animal that is not native to the country where it is kept. They are completely reliant on their keeper to provide an appropriate environment and food to stay healthy and to exhibit natural behaviours. Examples of exotic pets are (but not limited to) certain fish, reptiles, and arachnids.
- **Communal living** – Buildings that house more than one home within. Examples of this are (but not limited to) flats and bungalows within general needs, supported and older persons accommodation. Communal living schemes may or may not have staff such as Scheme Managers or Site Compliance Officers working on them. Most examples of communal living have communal areas and shared facilities.
- **Communal and shared facilities** – areas within the confines of communal living schemes such as (but not limited to) lifts, stairwells, corridors, hallways, laundry areas.
- **Communal Social Facilities.** Areas designed for the enjoyment and social pleasure of our customers such as (but not limited to) bars, bistros, lounges, and meeting rooms.

4. Consultation

Consultation in relation to this policy has taken place with the following: -

- Key internal stakeholders including colleagues representing Older Persons Services, Supported Housing, General Needs, Asset Management, Repairs and Health and Safety
- Survey of over two thousand customers
- Customer Scrutiny Panel
- Equality Impact Assessment Team
- External legal check
- Customer Connect Panel
- Risk and Compliance Group
- Customer Services Committee

The policy is linked to the Safety & Quality Standard, Tenancy Standard, and the Neighbourhood and Community Standard.

5. Background and Context

This Policy outlines the approach YHG will take to ownership of pets within our customers' homes and how they are managed in our schemes and within our neighbourhoods.

We want residents to own and enjoy pets in their homes as we believe pets can have a significant positive impact on their owner's physical and mental health. We also want and need customers to be responsible pet owners.

Subject to contract restrictions such as in the lease or tenancy agreement, customers are permitted to own a range of small domestic and exotic pets including fish, caged birds, and cats and dogs. In most instances residents do not need to request permission in advance, but there are specific criteria in the next section where permission needs to be sought.

There will be instances where it is not permitted for a resident to own a pet, e.g., where YHG is not the freeholder, the property is subject to a restricted lease agreement, or it is agency managed, or the tenancy agreement does not allow it.

Permission of ownership can be withdrawn, e.g. if a resident breaches the terms of their tenancy agreement, or if a resident breaches other aspects of this policy. Enforcement action will be taken where pets cause a nuisance, are mistreated, or not cared for properly.

YHG have an accompanying pet procedure which sets out how customers can seek permission to own a pet and how we will provide support and enforcement when necessary.

6. Policy Detail

6.1 Permission and notification

Subject to the terms of the tenancy agreement or lease, our permission criteria are as follows:

- All customers may keep reasonable (max of 2) number of domestic pets that can be kept in cages and / or tanks without seeking permission from YHG.
- All customers living in a non-communal setting may keep dogs / cats (in any combination up to a maximum of two) without seeking permission from YHG.
- In communal living, customers must seek permission from YHG to own a dog, cat or any other pet that requires access through communal areas on a regular basis. YHG will not reasonably withhold permission, but it is important for us to understand where these pets are kept so we can manage our communal areas and facilities.
- All permission will only be granted upon the approval of an assurance questionnaire which commits the customer to responsible pet ownership.
- Official assistance or guide dogs are normally allowed for all customers (regardless of property type), if this has been properly determined by a professional, such as a registered medical doctor or therapist. Customers must provide evidence on request should this be the case.

- Permission must be sought by all customers who wish to own exotic pets. Again, permission will not be unreasonably withheld but there may be additional risks we have to consider with regards to exotic pets.
- YHG retain the right to withdraw permission where the pet has caused nuisance, or we believe the owner to be showing signs of animal cruelty or neglect.

6.2 Pets not permitted within our homes.

Under no circumstances are households permitted to keep the following as pets:

- Animals listed under the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976 (including large mammals, carnivores, larger or venomous reptiles, dangerous spiders, and scorpions)
- Any endangered species
- Any hybrid between a domestic and a wild animal
- Bees
- Dogs listed under the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 unless exempt as explained below.
- Guard dogs
- Livestock (including horses and cattle)
- Breeding of pets or animals or any associated activity is not permitted and is considered a breach of tenancy.

6.3 XL Bully Types and Dangerous Dogs

XL Bully Types.

Under the 2023 amendment to the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991, XL Bully Types are banned in England without a certificate of exemption. If any customers own or want to own an XL Bully Type dog, they must contact their local housing team and a register of ownership will be kept and managed locally. Owners are expected to take all necessary precautions as directed by government:

- Certificate can be produced, and a copy taken by YHG to be kept on file.
- Proof of microchipping provided, and a copy taken by YHG to be kept on file.
- Proof of Public Liability Insurance provided, and a copy taken by YHG to be kept on file.
- Proof of all relevant vaccinations and a copy taken by YHG to be kept on file.
- Dogs managed appropriately and are kept on leads and muzzled in public places (including cars)
- They are kept in a secure place and cannot escape.

XL Bully Types are defined as “Dangerous Dogs” by the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 (2023 Amendment) and as a result, our approach in dealing with them is consistent with all dog breeds that are defined as such under the Act.

A certificate of exemption does not necessarily mean YHG will give consent for the dog to be kept at one of its properties. Consideration will be given to this on a case by case basis, in line with any contractual agreement (e.g. tenancy agreement) and this policy.

YHG reserves the right to revoke permission of ownership if the dog becomes dangerous and / or if they are a nuisance to neighbours and / or causing anti-social behaviour.

Tenancy enforcement action will be taken as appropriate.

Dangerous Dogs Act 1991

Where we receive a report of a resident not complying with the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 by having a certificate of exemption, we will ask the owner for proof the dog has a certificate of exemption.

Following a report to us about a dog which may be listed under the Dangerous Dogs Act, we will contact the resident identified as owning the dog to make clear our policy. If a resident does not have a certificate of exemption, or the owner is otherwise not complying with the restrictions under the Dangerous Dogs Act, we will contact the police.

Where we believe a dog meets the definition of a Dangerous Dog, but the owner states otherwise, we will request proof to assure this is the case. If proof is not provided, we will report to the police and the local authority for a determination.

A certificate of exemption does not necessarily mean YHG will give consent for the dog to be kept at one of its properties. Consideration will be given to this on a case by case basis, in line with any contractual agreement (e.g. tenancy agreement) and this policy.

YHG reserves the right to revoke permission of ownership if the dog becomes dangerous and / or if they are a nuisance to neighbours and / or causing anti-social behaviour.

Tenancy Enforcement action will also be taken where appropriate.

6.4 Keeping our customers safe

YHG have a Pet Procedure which enables colleagues to assist and support customers to manage their pets appropriately. The procedures also enable enforcement in the event of a customer not taking either sufficient care of their pet, or indeed not taking appropriate safety precautions and putting neighbours in danger.

YHG support pet ownership, but we must ensure the safety of all our customers is our priority. The onus will be on the owner of pets to ensure they do not pose a risk or nuisance to any of their neighbours or visitors to their scheme or neighbourhood.

6.5 Keeping our colleagues safe

When colleagues are conducting home visits, it will be a requirement for the customer to allow the visit to take place in a room free from pets. This is to protect our staff. It will also minimise the risk of any allergic reactions.

This directive will be included in letters to customers. Colleagues are advised to liaise with their line manager if they feel uncomfortable or at risk. YHG also reserve the right to cancel home visits in the event of a customer refusing to move their pets into a separate room.

This applies to employees of YHG, but also contractors working on our behalf.

6.6 Communal areas and shared facilities

In the main pets are to be kept inside the confines of our customers' homes. However, on occasion where pets need to be taken outside (such as a dog needing to be walked), pets must be restrained using leads or harnesses (and if necessary, a muzzle) and must always be accompanied by their owner.

Owners of pets are required to respect their neighbours when being accompanied by their pets in communal areas. We would expect a level of courteous behaviour such as a dog walker using a separate lift in a block, if there are customers already waiting. This would minimise the risk to allergies and fear from those customers who may have a phobia.

Pets are not expected to foul in our communal areas. However in the event this happens and is unavoidable, the pet owner is responsible for the immediate removal (and if necessary, cleaning) of any fouling and / or waste.

Whilst pets are permitted in communal areas as explained above, pets are not permitted in communal facilities such as laundry rooms, bistros, bars and communal lounges, unless they are an official assistance or guide dog.

For the purposes of this policy, communal garden areas and open spaces are treated in the same way as lifts, stairwells, and corridors. If pets are required to transport through these areas, then they must be restrained accordingly and accompanied by their owners. However communal gardens and open spaces are not places for pet recreation and customers are not to use these areas for that.

Pets are prohibited to be unaccompanied by their owner and unrestrained in communal areas under any circumstances.

6.7 Playgrounds and Community Centres

Pets are not permitted in YHG owned playgrounds, community centres and open spaces. The only exception to this would be guidance or assistance animals.

6.8 Tenancy agreements and leases

Where YHG are not the freeholder, there may be preventative clauses in the tenancy agreement and lease which could require additional permission to be sought.

This needs to be balanced with the potential for nuisance to other residents if pet owners are not responsible in the way they care for their pet and manage their pet's behaviour.

Existing tenancy agreements or leases set out if residents are allowed to keep a pet in their property. There are some cases where the lease or tenancy agreement state residents can only keep a pet with our permission, or that a resident cannot keep a pet.

In some cases this could lead to the resident being asked to rehouse the pet. In some blocks, where YHG do not own the freehold, we are bound by the rules of the freeholder and what is in our agreement with them. As such residents should check with YHG before acquiring and homing a pet.

Residents in shared accommodation (e.g., shared living facilities, kitchens, bathroom), will need to seek permission in advance.

YHG retain the right to withdraw permission where the pet has caused nuisance, or we believe the owner to be showing signs of animal cruelty or neglect.

Failure to comply with the above, can lead to the resident being asked to rehouse the dog.

6.9 Pet Owner Responsibilities

We expect all pet owners to behave responsibly by upholding the following standards:

- All pets must be cared for responsibly, and in line with Section 9 (2) of the Animal Welfare Act 2006.
- All pets must be kept under proper control and not cause a nuisance to other households.
- Pets must be kept in a separate room when YHG employees or contractors attend a property.
- Pet owners need to be mindful of other residents who may have allergies or are nervous around animals.
- No fouling in communal areas.
- Pet owners must actively seek to prevent unpleasant odours being emitted from their property due to their pet(s).
- Owners must ensure their home is suitable for a pet e.g., if the pet will occasionally enter a back garden, the area must be suitable with no means of escape for the pet to other properties or outside areas outside of the boundary of the customer's home.
- Animals must not damage any YHG property, including communal parts of the building and neighbouring properties. Owners may be recharged for any repairs which are needed because of such damage.
- Animals must not be kept for the purposes of breeding or sale.

- Owners must have suitable arrangements in place for looking after their pet during periods of absence such as holidays or emergencies.
- Cat or dog flaps (or similar devices) must not be installed without our prior consent as these can compromise the fire safety of a property. They are not permitted on doors that open onto shared areas or doors that part of the fire protection within a building.
- In situations where a customer is temporarily looking after a pet for a friend or family member, all the above requirements apply. They also apply to visitors of customers' homes.
- Deceased pets must be buried or disposed of in a responsible and safe manner and cannot be buried in communal gardens or within the confines of our customers' homes.
- Pet owners are responsible for insuring their pets and having appropriate insurance in place.
- YHG will not be responsible in any way for loss, damage or accident caused by any pet.

6.10 Nuisance

- We will work with households to address pet-related issues or any circumstances affecting the owner which have led to such issues. This may include referrals to specialist animal welfare organisations for information, advice, and guidance.
- Where a pet owner fails to engage with such efforts, or if the level of nuisance, cruelty or neglect is significant, we will take more serious action. This may include making a referral to the local authority and/or police, demanding the rehoming of the animal, or in some cases seeking possession of the property or taking injunctive proceedings. Where a decision has been made to rehome an animal, we will allow this to take place within what we consider a reasonable time limit.
- We will report all incidents of pets being out of control (or a danger to anyone) to the Police. We will also consider tenancy enforcement proceedings.
- We will report any complaint of animal cruelty to the RSPCA and will report any stray animals to the relevant local authority. We will also take enforcement action if appropriate to do so.
- We will investigate all issues relating to nuisance or anti-social behaviour in line with our Anti-Social Behaviour and Hate Crime Policy.

6.11 Enforcement

If we consider the nuisance to be serious or persistent then appropriate enforcement action can be taken against the pet owner. This may involve the following:

- Contacting the local Environmental Health Department to act under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 (e.g., incidents involving noise, fouling and smells).

- Contacting the RSPCA and or local authority Dog Warden Service who have responsibility to ensure animal health and welfare.
- Contacting the Police if the pet is believed to be dangerous and/ or covered under the Dangerous Dogs Act.
- Charging customers for repair or replacement where pets have caused damage to YHG property.
- Seeking an injunction to prevent residents from keeping a pet in a particular property or taking pets to specific areas.
- Seeking possession of a resident's home for serious and persistent breaches of their tenancy and / or lease.

6.12 Taking enforcement action

Where we receive reports of dogs listed under the Dangerous Dogs Act (e.g.. XL Bully dogs) but not related to a breach of the Dangerous Dogs Act (e.g. Anti-Social Behaviour, breach of tenancy) we will attempt to work with residents through referring them to external support (i.e. RSPCA) to address the issue.

We reserve the right to take tenancy enforcement action where appropriate. This may include us applying for an injunction to prevent the resident from keeping the dog at their property. If granted, this would in practice mean that the dog would be euthanised. Although such an order would in theory be within the court's power, dependent on circumstances we would need to justify that this was a just and convenient order to a judge through evidence. Enforcement action may also include taking steps to seek possession of the customers' home.

7. Responsibilities under this Policy

The Senior Leadership Team will have the responsibility to ensure that this policy is adhered to and that there is annual performance reporting of all key activities through the Housing and Customer Services Monthly Management Meeting.

The Head of Housing and Head of Customer Voice will conduct a 12-month review of the policy and present to Housing and Customer Services Senior Management Team.

Housing Management Teams across general needs, supported housing and older persons services will be responsible for the management of locally and application of this policy and subsequent procedures.

Residents have a responsibility to ensure the welfare of their pets is paramount and neighbours and YHG colleagues are kept free from hazards and risk.

8. Risk Management

Risks that have been carefully considered in the development are as follows:

Animal attacks.

Steps have been taken within this policy to ensure appropriate rules and regulations are in place regarding the management of our pets within our customers' homes. This includes rules around the types of pets customers are permitted to own. It also includes specific regulations for communal living. There are support measures in place and there are specific expectations placed on our customers with regards to pet ownership. The procedures also allow for the appropriate enforcement action to take place, in the appropriate circumstances.

Animal welfare.

There are appropriate steps taken within this policy and the subsequent procedures that protect the welfare of animals, including in the event our customers may be guilty of mistreating animals. Enforcement action includes alerting authorities such as the police, local authority, or the RSPCA in the event of animal cruelty or concern about welfare.

Allergies.

Appropriate steps have been taken within the policy to limit exposure our staff and customers have to allergies.

Media attention.

Given the recent press coverage concerning the legislation on XL Bully Types, there is a specific policy detail regarding how these dogs will be managed within our homes. Whilst XL Bully Types are defined as "Dangerous Dogs" under legislation, we have put some specific and additional measures in place.

Fire Safety.

All the necessary steps have been taken within this policy to ensure that responsible pet ownership within examples of communal living do not infringe on fire safety or evacuation within our buildings.

9. Data Protection, Record Storage and Retention

YHG recognises that confidentiality is important to customers and will treat all information relevant to each customer in the strictest confidence, as will all contractors, under the Data Protection Act 2018, including the GDPR provisions. YHG's Data Protection Policy will also be adhered to in following this policy.

10. Equality and Diversity

This Policy will be applied in a way which ensures equality of treatment for all customers without discrimination, or victimisation on account of any protected characteristic as defined within the Equality Act 2010. In drafting this policy YHG has had regard to its public sector equality duties under s149 of the Equality Act 2010, namely the need to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, and any other conduct that is prohibited under the Act.
- advance equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

The policy pays regard to diversities around access to and delivery of any services. An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) has been undertaken on this policy and copies of the EIAs are available upon request. On request YHG will provide translations of all its documents, policies and procedures in various languages and formats including computer disc, braille, large print, and tape.

11. Communication

All relevant staff will be required to read this policy under the mandatory reads section of Youggle. The policy will also be available via YHG website for customers.

12. Learning and Development

Within the first 6 months of policy approval, awareness sessions will be delivered to all managers within Housing & Customer Services who will filter this learning down through their teams.

All customer facing staff in housing management roles (including general needs, OPS and supported) will be expected to have a full understanding of this policy.

Awareness sessions will also be delivered to Senior Management Team in Asset and Repairs.

13. Performance Management of this Policy

This Policy will be discussed in housing management team meetings and 121s. the policy will also be reviewed at the 6-month stage to check if staff are working in line to the policy and to look for areas of improvement.

14. Review of this Policy

YHG will review this policy every 3 years, or earlier if required by statutory, regulatory, legislative, or best practice requirements or the need to update this policy following reviews of other Group wide policies or improvements identified by service reviews, scrutiny, or feedback from customers.

The Head of Customer Voice and Insight will review this Policy.