

Pets in Service Users' Homes Policy

Policy Statement

This policy provides guidance to care workers on the implications of service users having pets in the homes that they visit. By pets are meant dogs, cats, fish, birds, hamsters, exotic animals, etc — any animal that is a member of the service user's household.

This domiciliary care service works on the basis that the care of any pet will remain the full responsibility of the service user or other members of their household. It will only take part in the care of any pet if it has been agreed as part of the contract with the service user and the tasks are clearly stated in the service user plan. By care of the pet is meant the usual daily tasks involved in feeding, grooming, toileting and exercise. It does not mean that care workers should not interact in any way with a pet animal, particularly if they share a common interest with the animals and it is helpful to their relationship with the service user.

The care service also recognises that service users will often have a strong attachment to their pets and there are clear benefits to them in keeping them. It will not seek to influence or intervene in any situation that it comes where pets are present unless there are strong grounds for doing so, which are discussed below.

Importance of Risk Assessments

The care service always seeks information about household pets in its pre-service assessment and will establish its role or non-role on that basis. If there are pets in the house — which might or might not be the direct responsibility of the service user — the service will carry out a risk assessment based on three main implications of the fact of there being a pet or pets in the house. The assessment will determine if there are:

- health and safety risks of any kind to the service user from the delivery of the proposed care service because of the pet's or pets' presence, eg from the number of animals, risks of infection, the result of poor animal hygiene, etc
- health and safety risks of any kind to the visiting care workers, eg from pet allergens or behaviour and the conditions under which they are being kept
- risks to the health and wellbeing of the pet or pets because of any difficulties found in providing proper care to the pet, eg where there are clear signs of the pet being subject to neglect.

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Risk Control Measures

In many cases, the assessed risks will be minimal or low in any of the above respects or they will be controlled by standard health and safety practice, eg using gloves, personal protective clothing and suitable materials for clearing up an occasional spillage or mess.

In some cases, however, the risks could be sufficiently high to warrant stronger control measures, which will depend on the nature and level of the identified risks, but might involve, for example:

- a referral having been made to an external agency such as environmental health or even the local safeguarding authority where the person is at risk from harm from their pets or the conditions under which they are kept
- a risk control plan to exclude the pet from the presence of the service user and care workers during service delivery
- a referral having been made to the RSPCA or local animal welfare organisation where there are concerns about the pet's care.

The service recognises that risk assessment outcomes will vary from situation to situation. They will usually result in bespoke risk control measures being put into place following discussion with the parties involved and their consent being obtained to any proposed plans.

The service recognises any course of action must be taken with the service user's consent unless it can be shown that they lack the mental capacity to give their consent. With pets the taking of what to an outsider might appear to be an unwise decision is not necessarily evidence of lack of mental capacity. But where it is thought that a person cannot give their valid consent or take their own decisions on the issues raised by their pets, Mental Capacity Act 2005 "best interests" assessments and decision-taking will be followed.

The service recognises that it has a duty of care for the health and safety of its staff and must not expose them to any risk to their personal safety, for example, from being bitten or scratched by unfriendly pets, from catching infections from going into unhygienic conditions caused by pets or their lack of proper care, from allergic reactions to certain animals or from anxiety states and phobias associated with certain types of animal.

The service will always put the appropriate risk control measures in place and will make sure that no worker is exposed to an unacceptable risk or feels that they are being exposed to an unacceptable risk. It will always ascertain that visiting care workers are comfortable with the pets kept by the households that they go into or are at the least accepting of them with the risk control measures put into place.

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Training

Care staff are briefed on the implications of having to visit homes where there might be pets as part of their induction training and the service's policy will be discussed with them.

Specialist agencies concerned with pet welfare or with knowledge of certain types of pet might be asked to offer advice or training where circumstances require it.

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