Neighbourhoods and Communities

Animal Ownership Policy

Regulation and Legislation	This policy links to Animal Welfare Act 2006, Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 and Housing White Paper 2021; RSH Neighbourhood and Community Standard
Supporting documents	Letting of Homes Policy; Anti-Social Behaviour Policy; Breach of Tenancy Policy;
Scope	This policy sets out our approach to managing animal/pet ownership, the standards we expect of pet owners and outlines how we will deal with any nuisance caused by pets. It applies to customers living in: • General needs properties • Independent Living and Supported Housing • Shared Ownership and Leasehold properties
Reference to "Orbit" means Orbit Group which consists of Orbit Group Limited, Orbit Housing Association Limited, Orbit Homes (2020) Limited, Orbit Treasury Limited and Orbit Capital Plc.	

1. Introduction

1.1 This Policy outlines our approach to dealing with animals/pets in customer homes.

1.2 We encourage responsible pet ownership; balancing the positive impact pets can have, while ensuring they don't negatively affect others or cause a nuisance. We recognise that pets bring happiness and comfort to customers' lives, helping their owners through difficult times and improving their mental and physical wellbeing. As a social landlord we will not unreasonably refuse permission for customers to keep pets.

1.3 A pet is defined as a domesticated animal or bird that you have at home for pleasure, rather than one that is kept for work or food.

2. Policy Statement

2.1 Your tenancy agreement should set out if we allow pets and if you need permission. In some blocks, where we do not own the freehold, we will be bound by the rules of the freeholder and what is in our agreement with them. If you live in such a block or if you're unsure what is in your agreement, you should ask us to check for you.

2.2 If you move to your home via a Mutual Exchange your request to keep an animal/pet will be assessed in line with 4.1 and 4.2 of this policy regardless of the outgoing customers circumstances and any animals/pets they keep.

2.3 We encourage responsible pet ownership, in accordance with the Animal Welfare Act 2006. We will involve the RSPCA immediately where we suspect animal cruelty or neglect and encourage anyone who reports concerns about a pet to us, to do the same.

2.4 We will contact the RSPCA if you have a court order banning you from keeping animals and we are aware you have animals at the property.

2.5 Before making the commitment to own a pet and requesting permission to keep it at your home, we ask that you consider the impact on your home, your finances, your neighbours and the animal itself.

3. Owners' responsibilities

3.1 You must keep animals/pets in a reasonable manner and not allow them to cause a nuisance to anyone or cause damage to your home. You must not keep, or allow visitors to bring to your home, any livestock or animal classed as wild or dangerous in law.

3.2 We may ask you to keep animals/pets in a separate room when we visit your home e.g. contractors visiting to carry out a repair.

3.3 Animals must not be kept for the purposes of breeding or sale.

3.4 As identified in 4.1, the number of pets you can keep may be limited to ensure that there are no issues of overcrowding with potential implications for the health of the animals, people or the upkeep and condition of the property.

3.5 Dogs (including those visiting with friends or family) should not be kept outside for long periods and must be kept on a lead at all times in communal areas of our buildings and grounds.

3.6 Animals must not be tied up on residential property or in communal areas.

3.7 You must not leave animals unattended for a period of time that will result in the welfare needs of the animal not being met and should have suitable arrangements in place for their care if you go away.

3.8 Animals should have regular routine healthcare including vaccinations and regular control of parasites (e.g. fleas and worms) where appropriate.

3.9 You are responsible for cleaning up after your pet within your property and in any gardens, pathways and/or communal areas

3.10 In the event your pet sadly passes away it must not be buried in communal grounds.

3.11 Failure to meet these expectations may be a breach of your Tenancy Agreement.

4. Permission to keep pets

4.1 You must obtain our permission before you can keep uncaged domestic pets (such as a dog or cat) unless there is a special exemption such as a guide dog or assistance dog. You must apply for permission if you:

- Would like to have an animal/pet (except small pets, such as hamsters, gerbils and goldfish)
- Want to run an animal/pet related business from home e.g. grooming, dog walking, pet sitting
- Want to install dog or cat flaps - we need to check the flaps will not affect the door's fire safety. If a dog/cat flap is installed without permission and causes damage to the fabric of the door we may recharge the cost of any repair or replacement. If permission is granted, you should contact your home insurer before installing the flap as it could invalidate your insurance by making the door less secure.

  If energy efficient doors have been installed at your property, it will not be possible to install a cat flap or dog flap as this would invalidate the warranty. Depending on the type of energy efficient door and the property you live in, it may be possible for us to look at alternatives and these will be considered on a case-by-case basis when your application is received.

4.2 Permission will take into account the following:

- The terms and conditions of your tenancy agreement
- The suitability of the accommodation:
  - size and type of the property
  - size and species of the pet
  - the number of pets you already have
  - communal areas.

- Your ability to care for the animal/pet including any previous issues if you previously had animals/pets (this also includes if you or another member of your household have previously left an animal behind when moving out of any Orbit property)
- Local issues relating to animals/pets and anti-social behaviour
- Any breaches of tenancy relating to noise
- If you or another household member has any convictions for, or past history of abandonment, cruelty, neglect or mistreatment of animals, or convictions for any offences under the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 or has been disqualified from keeping animals or a particular type of animal due to a conviction
- Due to the nature of our Independent Living schemes, additional information will be requested from you about the pet at the time of your request for permission

4.3 We will grant permission for an assistance dog with supporting documentation.

4.4 Where we discover an animal/pet is being kept without our knowledge, it may be possible in some circumstances to obtain retrospective consent to keep the pet. However, the decision will be subject to whether we are satisfied that the conditions for keeping an animal/pet can be met in accordance with the criteria outlined in this policy.

4.5 If you feel we have refused a request for an animal/pet unfairly, you can appeal by following our Complaints and Customer Care Policy.

5. Restrictions

5.1 We will not allow you to keep:

- Any animal listed in the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976 including large or venomous snakes and certain types of spiders
- Dogs listed in the Dangerous Dog Act 1991 - Section 1
- Farm animals e.g. sheep, goats, pigs, cattle, horses, cockerels
- Bees
- Pets in guest rooms in Independent Living schemes

Please note:
from 31 December 2023 XL Bully dogs must be kept on a lead and muzzled in public from 1 February 2024 it will then be illegal to own an XL Bully dog if it is not registered on the Index of Exempted Dogs and meets strict requirements. You can read about these on the gov.uk website.

6. What if there is a problem?

6.1 We will ask you to rehome your animal/pet(s) if:

- You are keeping animal/pet(s) where we wouldn't give permission or refused your request
- Where a customer's animal/pet ownership is proven to be a risk to their own personal health and safety
- Your animal/pet is causing a nuisance and you are not working with us to resolve this
- Your animal/pet is causing a nuisance and there are no further options to solve this
- Your animal/pet attacks or injures other animals or people
- Your pet is causing damage to the property or the condition of your property is unhygienic because of your animals/pets
- You have too many animals/pets in your home.

6.2 If we ask you to rehome any animal/pet, we will tell you why and discuss a timescale with you to remove the animal/pet from your home. We will confirm our agreement in writing.

6.3 We expect you to engage with us and help resolve problems. We may take possession proceedings for breach of tenancy if you fail to put right any problems or fail to rehome your animal/pet within a reasonable time.

6.4 As identified in 2.3, we will involve the RSPCA immediately where we suspect animal cruelty or neglect and encourage anyone who reports concerns about a pet to us to do the same.

7. Temporary moves

7.1 If a property becomes uninhabitable or inaccessible due to emergency situations such as fires and floods, or due to major works that cannot be completed with the customer in situ we will try and source accommodation that allows pets. However, if this is not possible, we will initially seek to establish if it possible for friends or family members to house the pets on a short-term basis (2-3 days). If this is not possible, we will meet the cost of rehoming the pets for the duration of the reactive or planned move. We do not include pets as members of a household, and we cannot guarantee that any temporary accommodation offered will allow them.

8. Roles and Responsibilities

8.1

Role	Responsibility
Neighbourhood Manager	Permission Request for general needs
Neighbourhood Manager	Case Management for general needs
Neighbourhood Manager	Case Management for leasehold
IL Scheme Officer/Scheme Manager	Case Management for Independent Living
IL Supported Housing Officer	Case Management for supported
Area Neighbourhood Manager / IL Regional Manager	Performance Management Case reviews

9. Performance Controls and Business Risk

9.1 Compliance with this policy will be monitored by team managers.

9.2 Performance in the delivery of the service will be assessed by team managers and area managers.

9.3 Performance will be shared through monthly scorecards.

9.4 Orbit will carry out a fundamental review of this policy every three years or sooner subject to legal, regulatory changes or if internal changes require it.

10. Essential information

10.1 All Orbit policies and procedures are developed in line with our approach to the following, data protection statement, equality diversity and inclusion (EDI) approach, complaints and customer care policy and our regulatory and legal obligations to ensure we deliver services in a lawful manner and treat people equally and fairly. Orbit's privacy policy can be accessed on our website www.orbitcustomerhub.org.uk/publications/policies/

EA	Equality Analysis was completed in Dec 2018 and is available to view.
DPIA	A DPIA was approved in Oct 2018 and is available to view.
Consultation	**Internal:** Tenancy Management, Lettings, Independent Living
	External: Customer Engagement group
Applies to	Business wide

Document control

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Directorate Customer and Communities

		Date
Approved by	Customer and Communities SMT	Sept 2023
Last review	Head of Neighbourhoods	Jul 2026
	Next Review (or sooner if changed)	Sept 2026 Extended Mar 2027

Revision History

Version Number	Date	Comments / Reason for revision
v1.0	Aug 2023	Full three-year review. Title changed from Pets Policy. Style and tone of policy revised. Section added on Owners' responsibilities.
v1.1	Dec 2023	5.1 updated with information on XL Bully dogs
v1.2	May 2024	4.1 amended – removed references to ground floor and self-contained flats
v1.3	Jul 2026	Roles and responsibilities updated to reflect new Neighbourhood model