

Wirral Fostering Service

Dogs and Pets Policy and Guidance

IT TAKES A BIG **HEART** TO FOSTER



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Relevant Regulations and Standards

- Dangerous Dog Act 1991 (amended 1997)
- Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976
- Breeding and Sale of Dogs (Welfare) Act 1999
- The Fostering Services Regulations 2011 (Reg 26)
- National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services 2011 (Standard 31.1)

Relevant Fostering Service Procedure related to this Policy

- Household Health and Safety Guidance and Annual Checklist
- Safe Care Planning

Relevant Forms

- [CoramBAAF Dog Assessment Form - Appendix A](#)
- [CoramBAAF Pet Assessment Form - Appendix B](#)

1. Introduction

This policy sets out how the Fostering Services aim to take a balanced and proportionate approach to the role of dogs and pets in the fostering household. Dogs and other domestic pets can help provide very positive outcomes for fostered children and assist with achieving positive, shared family experiences. However, dogs and some pets can also introduce serious challenges to a household and on occasions may even serve as a distraction or risk to the primary task of providing high quality care to children. This policy recognises that safeguarding and promoting the welfare of the child is of paramount importance. Recognising underpinning legislation and relevant national guidance, the Fostering Service will:

- Assess during Part One of the Assessment, potential risk posed by a specific dog or pet;
- Assess and advise on owner attitude and approach to pet management;
- Provide clear expectations on pet owners regarding their responsibilities;
- Regularly review pet management within the household.

2. Dangerous Dogs and Pets

Wirral Borough Council will not approve Foster Carers who keep any dog listed under the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 (amended 1997), or where the prospective Foster Carer owns any pet listed in the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976.

Current legislation refers to 4 types of dog breed which are banned: * *Pit Bull Terrier* * *Dogo Argentino* * *Japanese Tosa* * *Fila Brasileiro*. Descriptions of banned types, related breed issues and further guidance is available from the Defra ([Dept. Environment & Rural Affairs](#)) website and via the RSPCA.

The Fostering Service will seek appropriate advice and support from the RSPCA in the event of any uncertainty regarding the breed of animal or dog or potential of risk.

3. Number of dogs in household/limitations on number of household pets

In general, two dogs will normally be regarded as the acceptable maximum number in a foster home. This is because 'dogs are fundamentally pack animals and having more than two dogs' increases the likelihood of a pack mentality developing therefore increasing risk and potential management problems. Looking after more than two dogs can be a time consuming and demanding task in its own right, aside from any fostering tasks' (CoramBAAF Practice Note 42).

However, there may be occasions where more than two dogs in a household is appropriate and manageable (e.g. because of size/breed). Fostering households with more than two dogs will be subject to additional scrutiny to ensure their presence is not compromising the quality of care provided. This additional scrutiny will take place both during the assessment and the Foster Carer review processes.

The same emphasis on scrutiny is placed on ensuring that any number/combination of pets in a household is not serving as a distraction to providing high quality foster care or that this poses inappropriate risk.

4. Assessing and Reviewing Dogs and Pets in the Fostering household

Initial risk assessment and guidance will be completed at the recruitment initial home visit stage for potential applicants and will be included in the home visit report. If there are any serious issues raised regarding pet ownership (e.g. breed banned under legislation) or pet management, then applicants will be advised that we will not pursue application.

At the outset of formal Form F assessment, assessing staff will achieve the current CoramBAAF Dog or Pet Assessment Form (Appendix A or B whichever relevant) with the applicants. The forms require the owner(s) to provide detailed assessment and risk management information on the type and number of dogs/pets in the household and any potential impact issues for children placed.

When assessing Foster Carers, the Fostering Service is committed to ensuring dogs and pets receive attention and consideration, particularly the gathering of evidence regarding the temperament and personality of any dogs in the household. It is the responsibility of the applicant/foster carer to demonstrate that the temperament of a dog (or where applicable, other pet) is compatible with the fostering task.

Staff should ask owners for any supporting evidence (e.g. attendance at handling/obedience training; veterinary/vaccination records) which can assist with reassurance on pet behaviour and management. If there are serious issues of concern regarding a Dog's potential risk arising from the assessment, staff can request owners undertake a Dog Vet Check & Reference.

Applicant/Carer signed Dog/Pet Assessment forms should be uploaded to the Foster Carer file and copies retained by the applicant/carers.

Any new dog or pet entering the household subsequent to approval or previous Foster Carer review will require the Supervising Social Worker to complete a Dog/Pet Assessment Form with the Foster Carer and confirm this information in the next Foster Carer Review. Any change in circumstances regarding pets should also be included in the annual Household Health and Safety check.

5. Working Dogs and Animals

Where prospective Foster Carers own working dogs (e.g. farm dogs or sheep dogs) these must be kept in a secure area outside the home where children cannot gain access. The assessing Social Worker will need to see the area and satisfy themselves that this is appropriate and secure.

A report or letter from the family's vet detailing the type of work undertaken by the animal should be referenced and confirmed in the relevant Dog/Pet Assessment form.

6. Animals in households kept for breeding

Households who keep animals for the express intention of breeding will require specific and individual assessment.

As with working dogs, the assessing Social Worker will need to be satisfied that the animals are kept in secure, separate areas which are not accessible by children and that they are protected for example, from the increased risk of aggression from dogs and other animals protecting their young. The assessing Social Worker in any assessment report for Fostering Panel will also need to be clear that the breeding of dogs or other animals is not a significant distraction from the fostering task.

If the Foster Carer is breeding five dog litters or more then the household will need to be formally registered under the Breeding and Sale of Dogs (Welfare) Act 1999.

7. Guidance – Pets, Health and Hygiene

Pet health and hygiene issues are identified for assessment and discussion in the Dog and Pet Assessment Forms. However, it is important for applicants, Foster Carers and staff to be generally aware of the range of potential health risks that can be associated with dogs and pets and that the following information and guidance is discussed where relevant:

Potential Health Risks:

- Cat scratches, bites and litter trays can cause Toxoplasmosis;
- Toxocara canis, is a parasite that lives inside dogs bodies;
- Bird Psittacosis, sometimes called 'Parrot Fever', can be relevant to other birds

To confirm to Health and Safety requirements and appropriate hygiene, households with pets should ensure:

- Dogs and Cats are wormed and deflead regularly;
- All vaccinations should be up to date. Carers should support this with a certificate or letter from their vet;
- All outside areas should be kept clean of fouling;
- Pets in cages must be kept clean and gloves should be worn when cleaning;
- Cat litter trays should be unable to be accessed by crawling babies/toddlers. Gloves should also be worn when cleaning cat litter trays.
- Where cats are kept, babies should be protected by the use of a net on prams or pushchairs;
- If chickens are kept, they should be secured appropriately and vet checked;
- Fish tanks should be placed where children cannot gain access.

8. Actions in the event of injury to a child by a pet

If a dog or other pet in the household bites, scratches or in any way injures a fostered child, the Foster Carer must take the following actions immediately:

- Remove the animal from the household;
- Give the child appropriate first aid and seek medical advice/attention as soon as possible;
- Notify the Supervising Social Worker and Child's Social Worker;
- Complete and forward to the Supervising Social Worker an Accident/Incident Recording Form and record the incident on the Daily/Weekly Diary Recording Sheet.