



PET FRIENDLY PROPERTIES

THE PRIVATE RENTED SECTOR

SUMMARY REPORT



BATTERSEA

HERE FOR EVERY DOG AND CAT

At a time when more people than ever are renting properties, and increasing numbers are looking to own a pet, Battersea's Pet Friendly Properties campaign is promoting open and constructive dialogue between landlords and tenants to support responsible pet ownership in rented accommodation – for the benefit of pets, tenants and landlords.

The COVID-19 pandemic has made people re-evaluate their relationships with their pets. Animals are more important than ever and for many people, a pet is a key part of their perfect home.

We want to achieve long-lasting change, so everyone can experience the joy of pet ownership – whatever their housing situation.



I was scared to ask my landlord as, well, I guess, scared to hear a 'no' because we like our flat and don't want to move.

From tenant chat forum



BACKGROUND TO THIS REPORT

The COVID-19 pandemic presented a huge challenge to the mental well-being of the nation, with long periods of self-isolation, restricted social contact and social distancing having negative and long-lasting consequences for mental health.¹

The social and health benefits of owning a dog or cat in these circumstances have been well-documented.² Pet owners are 60% more likely than non-pet owners to get to know people in their neighbourhoods and build support networks.³ They also make 15% fewer visits to a doctor for both physical and mental health reasons, saving the NHS £2.45 billion annually.⁴ The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Cats (APGOCATS) found that cat ownership and interaction with cats have the potential to help tackle loneliness across all age groups in specific social situations, especially if coupled with other targeted measures.⁵

It is perhaps not surprising that there was a huge surge in demand for pets

as people turned to dogs and cats for comfort, companionship and support during the pandemic.^{6 7 8} Battersea research found that rescue animals were a profound source of support for many owners during the national lockdown in 2020.⁹

The pandemic and the anxiety it generated for many people has shone a spotlight on the value of pets for mental health. In doing so, it has highlighted the unfairness of barriers to keeping a pet that can disenfranchise whole communities from the health and well-being benefits of pet ownership.

Housing tenure is one such barrier.

While owner-occupiers are largely unfettered in being able to keep a



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SAVING THE NHS £2.45 BILLION ANNUALLY



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pet, those who rent or lease their home typically do not have the same freedom, requiring at least the permission of their landlord to keep a pet if not banned from doing so.

This can lead to harrowing situations where tenants have to give up their pets. Faced with such barriers, some tenants will even risk eviction to keep their pet, hiding this from their landlord and breaching the terms of their tenancy agreement.^{10 11}

In 2018, Battersea launched its Pet Friendly Properties campaign with a first report¹² focusing on the social rented sector. This report turns to the private rented sector. In 2021, property website Zoopla reported that only 7% of private landlords listed their properties as suitable for pets.¹³

Cats Protection estimates that 1 million households would like to own a cat but cannot because they live in rented accommodation that does not allow pets.¹⁴ However, the sector landscape is complex and changing, with new market forces and political pressure growing on landlords to become more pet friendly.^{15 16 17 18} As housing is a devolved issue and the legal landscape is slightly different in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, this report focuses on the private sector in England. However, these issues are common to every country of the UK, even if the law is not.



Only 7% of properties were advertised as suitable for pets

ON LEADING PROPERTIES LISTING WEBSITE ZOOPLA IN 2021



The Government model (tenancy agreement) is far too long and now that it gives tenants more rights regarding pets, it's wholly unsuitable in my view.

From landlord chat forum



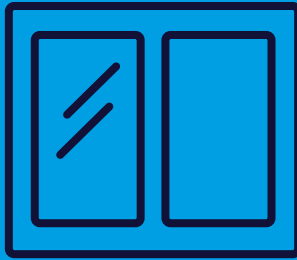
PET OWNERSHIP IN THE PRIVATE RENTED SECTOR

In 2018, Battersea launched its Pet Friendly Properties campaign with our first report focusing on the social rented sector.¹⁹ That report highlighted the vast inequality of opportunity for those renting their homes wanting to own a pet and how tenancy issues led to many having to give up their dog or cat for rehoming. Battersea has since been working with Local Authorities and Housing Associations to improve their pet policies, including Lambeth, Sutton, Catalyst and L&Q.

However, we recognised from the start that our first report only focused on one part of the picture. This successor report focuses now on the private rented sector (PRS).

In the UK, 4.6 million households (23% of all households)²⁰ rent their home from 2.6 million private landlords.²¹ In 2021, Zoopla reported that only 7% of landlords listed their properties as suitable for pets.²² This is despite a quarter of the population having a cat or dog.²³

The barriers to pet ownership in the PRS disenfranchise many tenants from the health and welfare benefits of owning a pet. The COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns have turned a spotlight particularly on the value of pets for mental health,²⁴ as well as the importance of our homes. In doing so, they have highlighted how the inequality of opportunity for pet ownership can have far-reaching consequences.



RIGHTMOVE REPORTS AN

**120% increase in
demand for pet friendly
properties in 2020**



I have recently been asked by my family if I can adopt my nan's cat. I straight up said that I'm not allowed pets as part of my tenancy agreement, but I would much rather have her than see her go back into an adoption centre as she is already a rescue.

From tenant chat forum



However, the pressure for change is building:

- The role of the PRS is changing. It is now a mainstream provider of family homes. **35% of the PRS in England now provides long-term accommodation for households with children,²⁵ the types of home most likely to want a pet dog.²⁶**
- The pandemic and the lengthy lockdowns of 2020 and 2021 have had a profound impact on people's relationships with their home and pet ownership, with people saying that their home had become more important to them now than ever²⁷ and more now owning a dog or cat.^{28 29}
- Renters are just as likely as anyone else to want to complete their home with a pet and share in the great mental health, physical and social benefits of pet ownership. **At the height of the pandemic in 2020, 35% of applicants to Battersea to rehome a dog or cat were from people who rented their home, and Rightmove reports that demand for rented properties that allow pets has increased by 120% in the last year.³⁰**
- There is a strong political desire to see more pet friendly tenancies, including from the UK Government, which talks of its revised Model Tenancy Agreement (MTA) as "bringing an end to the unfair blanket ban on pets",³¹ and from the Mayor of London making pet friendly policies a condition of funding under the Affordable Homes Programme³² – **22% of the entire PRS in England is in London.³³**

SIMPLE LIFE HOMES

Simple Life Homes is a Build-to-Rent provider with a portfolio of over 4,400 properties across the UK. As is standard within the rental market, Simple Life used to take a pet deposit from tenancies with pets. After the Tenant Fees Act 2019* capped the allowable deposit at five weeks and banned landlords from charging an extra pet deposit, Simple Life Homes, like many other private and BTR landlords, implemented a 'pet rent' to protect their assets from potential damage caused by customers' pets.

However, after some internal research, Simple Life found no correlation between pets, damage and the amount of deposit withheld at the end of the tenancy. As a result, they stopped charging pet rent as they felt it was unnecessary. Moreover, as their research also showed that pets had a positive impact on their tenants' health and well-being, they increased the maximum pet occupancy in their developments from 20% to 50%, which also better reflected the proportion of UK households with pets. Tenants wishing to keep a dog or cat must ask permission and sign up to a pet policy setting out their responsibilities.

[simplelifelifehomes.co.uk](https://www.simplelifelifehomes.co.uk)



- Build-to-Rent (BTR) is a new and growing model of supply that is making pet friendliness a commercially competitive issue in the sector, with many BTR landlords recognising the commercial as well as societal benefits of allowing pet ownership. **In one BTR development of flats, 40% of tenants own a pet, with 75% of these pets being a dog.**³⁴
- The UK Government's leasehold reform programme may ease some of the barriers to pet ownership in the sector. **37% of all dwellings in the PRS are rented from leaseholders and are therefore potentially subject to restrictive covenants on pet ownership in the lease.**³⁵

* <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2019/4/contents/enacted>



76% of tenants already own or aspire to take on a pet in the future



Every property states no pets allowed. It became apparent to us we would need to ignore that, continue viewing until we found a property and then try to negotiate. It was an awful position to be in. I recall feeling like we would never find anywhere. The one we live in now also advertised as no dogs, the agent showing us around also checked and no dogs were allowed. An email to them pleading and paying double deposit finally got us in.

Tenant talking to Battersea



KEY RESEARCH FINDINGS

In 2021, Battersea conducted a survey of tenants renting in the private sector, a survey of private landlords with the aid of the National Residential Landlords Association, and interviews with both landlord organisations and with BTR providers. The key findings included:

- Demand for pet friendly accommodation in the sector is high, with 43% of tenants owning a pet and a further 33% aspiring to own a pet now or in the future. **This suggests that 76% of tenants are directly affected by landlord pet policies, and that landlords should be aware that three in four tenants are looking for somewhere they could potentially take on a pet.**
- **35% of landlords said they did not allow their tenants to keep either a dog or cat**, a significant and welcome improvement over the figure of 55% in 2017.³⁶
- A lack of pet friendly housing is most acute where flats are concerned. Making up 64% of all dwellings in the sector, **dogs and cats were not allowed in 40% and 37% of flats respectively.**
- As **75% of flats in the sector are rented from landlords who own the property on a leasehold basis**,³⁷ many tenants potentially will be subject to restrictive covenants on pets in leases.



Only 3% of dog owners

REPORTED THAT THEIR DOG
HAD EVER DAMAGED PROPERTY



When we moved into our rented home we had to sign a pet agreement and pay an extra deposit. We also have to get the house professionally cleaned and fix any damage once we leave.

From tenant chat forum



- **Dogs and cats were banned in 25% and 24% of family houses respectively**, signalling inconsistent practices since most landlords allowed pets in such accommodation – the reasons behind such bans are unclear.
- Pet bans affected tenants in significant ways:
 - 60% of people living in accommodation where pets are banned would like to own a pet, either now or in the future.
 - 50% of pet owners said they had experienced difficulties finding somewhere to live, mainly because landlords were unwilling to take pets but also because they had to agree to pay for any damage or specialist cleaning or an additional deposit. This refusal was not always accompanied by a specific reason from the landlord.
 - 9% of tenants living in accommodation where pets were banned said they kept a pet, apparently in breach of their contract and risking eviction.
- The main reason landlords, some of whom are renting out a much-loved family home, were hesitant about allowing pets was concern about the risk of damage to their property or mess. **However, only 3% of dog owners reported that their pet had ever been the subject of a noise complaint and 3% said their dog had ever damaged property.**



42% of landlords would consider pets

IF THEY COULD INSIST ON INSURANCE AGAINST DAMAGE CAUSED BY PETS



I think a house is not a home without a cat, dog, rabbit or guinea pig. I also think there are so few landlords that allow pets that it might increase the demand for your property. I've always put in my adverts that pets can be discussed, and within reason would never refuse one.

From landlord chat forum



- **42% of landlords said they would be more willing to consider pets if they could insist on insurance against damage caused by pets**, impose a higher security deposit for pets (33%), and see evidence of responsible ownership or training (31%). 66% of tenants felt that landlords should deal fairly with requests to keep a pet, agreeing that this could include attaching such conditions.
- Pet policies in the BTR market are often more progressive. Pet ownership fits with this commercial model which relies on low turnover and long tenancies for financial viability.
- 40% of tenants living in flats managed by one BTR provider (Fizzy Living) own a pet, 75% of these pets being a dog. Few of these were the cause of any complaint or damage, with just two pet-related complaints in one development of 1,000 flats in 2019. Pet owners also stayed longer in their tenancies, on average 24 months compared with 21 months for tenants without pets.²⁰
- The UK Government's revised MTA has so far made little impact. Only 9% of landlords said they had changed their behaviour as a result and most tenants were unaware of the Agreement.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1



Review the impact of the revised pets clause in the UK Government's Model Tenancy Agreement

It was the UK Government's hope and expectation that the revised pets clause in its MTA would bring an end to unfair bans on pets.³⁸ We could find, unfortunately, little evidence of this happening so far when researching this report. One year on from its introduction, the revised MTA should be reviewed to assess its impact in encouraging more pet friendly policies and the need for further action, including legislation to ban 'no pets' clauses in tenancy agreements if necessary.

2



Incentivise insurance against pet damage

There is some important common ground between tenants and landlords on the issue of insurance. Allowing landlords to insist that tenants take out insurance against damage caused by their pets would enable more landlords to accept pets. Landlords want this, it has political and public support including amongst dog- and cat-owning renters³⁹ and could be achieved relatively easily by amending the list of permitted payments in the Tenant Fees Act 2019.

3



Ensure public funds lever pet friendly properties

Wherever public funds are invested in building new homes for rent, pet friendly policies should be a condition of funding. Homes England, in delivering the Government's Affordable Homes Programme outside of London, should ensure that flexible pet policies are a funding criterion as is already the case in London.

4



Develop practical guidance on pets in flats

Organisations promoting pet friendly properties should, together with landlord organisations, develop practical advice specifically on how to assess requests to keep a dog or cat in a flat. This is where landlords experience the most difficult decision-making. The advice should draw on the experience of those landlords who permit pets in their flats, including in the BTR sector.

RECOMMENDATIONS

5



Ensure pet ownership is addressed in the work of the Commonhold Council

Many tenants, particularly those living in flats, are affected by restrictive covenants on pets in leases. The UK Government has accepted that the leasehold system is not working in consumers' best interests and has set up the Commonhold Council to encourage the widespread take-up of commonhold as an alternative form of tenure for flats. The issue of how to deal with and manage pet ownership in the commonhold system should be addressed in this work. This would include developing advice on appropriate pet clauses in Commonhold Community Statements and the process for handling requests to keep a pet. The animal welfare sector should be prepared to advise the Council on this.

6



Continue to build the economic case for pet friendly properties

Landlords' policies on pets are driven often by commercial considerations. This report and our previous research on the social rented sector found little evidence that pets cause more damage or complaints. Nevertheless, there is a perception amongst some more risk-averse landlords that accepting tenants with pets imposes additional management costs that outweigh the benefits. A rigorous economic analysis of the costs and benefits of accepting pets in tenancies is needed to provide the highest standard of evidence on this question. Battersea is planning to undertake such research to fill this important evidence gap.



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Battersea's Pet Friendly Properties campaign is promoting open and constructive dialogue between landlords and tenants to support responsible pet ownership in rented accommodation – for the benefit of pets, tenants and landlords.

Visit our campaign website to learn how we want to achieve long-lasting change, so everyone can experience the joy of pet ownership – whatever their housing situation.



[BATTERSEA.ORG.UK/PET-FRIENDLY-PROPERTIES](https://battersea.org.uk/pet-friendly-properties)

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Battersea Dogs & Cats Home is a registered charity no. 206394