

Assistance Dogs Policy

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Approved by	Senior Leadership Team (SLT)
Owner	Strategic Director - Richard Protheroe
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1. Purpose

- 1.1. This policy sets out the Council's position on Assistance Dogs attending Council buildings and licenced accommodation. Some disabled staff, visitors and tenants need to use a trained Assistance Dog, and under the Equality Act 2010, Assistance Dogs are always welcome on Stevenage Borough Council (SBC) premises, provided this policy is followed.
 - 1.1.2 SBC premises consists of the Council offices at both Daneshill, including the Customer Service Centre, as well as Cavendish Road. Any of the SBC Temporary Accommodation premises, all Housing First Accommodation and properties licenced via SBC for safe accommodation.
- 1.2. This policy aims to provide officers with clear guidelines within which to allow accompanying assistance dogs to attend Council buildings, or to reside within the Council provided licenced accommodation.
- 1.3. This is a new separate policy for specific guidance on Assistance Dogs. It is in line with the Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Policy (2022 - 2026) which was previously the main source of guidance for officers when advising on Assistance Dogs.

2. Scope

- 2.1. This policy applies to all visiting members of the public, employees of the Council, Councillors, contractors, and suppliers who provide services on behalf of the

Council. As well as tenants within our licenced accommodation (Temporary Accommodation, Housing First properties and Safe Spaces).

- 2.2. This policy relates to Assistance Dogs across all Council owned public buildings and to properties used for licenced accommodation. It is applicable to all Business Units.
- 2.3. Tenancy Agreements and Pet Agreements cover the conditions for Tenants living council homes.

3. Legal Framework

- 3.1. The policy complies with the Equality Act (2010), namely Section 4, the Protected Characteristics, and Section 98, Reasonable Adjustments.

Protected Characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.

The Equality Act 2010 says changes or adjustments should be made to ensure you can access the following things if you're disabled:

- education
 - employment - ask your employer for adjustments
 - housing - ask for adjustments in your home
 - goods and services like shops, banks, cinemas, hospitals, council offices, leisure centres
 - associations and private clubs like the Scouts and Guides, private golf clubs and working men clubs.
- 3.2 To comply with the requirements of the Equality Act (2010) all local authorities must:
 - Ensure disabled people have the right to be accompanied by their Assistance Dog in public places, including shops, restaurants, hospitals and on public transport.
 - Consider appropriate requests for dogs to be accommodated.
 - Allow the admittance and accommodation of assistance dogs as a reasonable adjustment for disabled persons.

4. Policy

- 4.1. Assistance Dogs are not pets. Assistance dogs are dogs that have been highly trained to carry out a range of tasks and alerts that support a disabled person or person with a long-term medical condition, and which may, but not necessarily,

have been qualified or accredited by one of many organisations. Assistance Dogs UK is a coalition of assistance dog charities that have been accredited by one of the two leading global authorities in the assistance dog industry, namely Assistance Dogs International and The International Guide Dog Federation. This includes but is not limited to:

- Guide Dogs
- Hearing Dogs
- Medical Detection Dogs
- Canine Partners
- Support Dogs
- And more

4.2 Assistance Dogs may have formal identification and could have been granted certification by the Department of Health on the basis that the dog's high standards of training, behaviour, health, and welfare are such that it should be permitted to accompany its owner at all times and in all places within the United Kingdom (unless there is a genuine health and safety risk). Not all Assistance Dogs will have official identification and may have been trained by a private trainer or individual.

4.3 On the grounds of health and safety responsibilities to staff, visitors and residents, SBC reserves the right to refuse access, or to revoke access, for a dog that does not comply with the Equality and Human Rights Commission description of an assistance dog:

- Highly trained.
- Will not wander freely around the premises.
- Will sit or lie quietly on the floor next to its owner.
- Trained to go to the toilet on command and so are unlikely to foul in a public place.
- Could be recognisable by the harness or identifying coat they wear. Assistance dog owners may have partnered with a training organisation on how to manage their assistance dog.

4.4 Assistance dogs are highly trained professional working animals and are unlikely to cause any issues. Owners are responsible for the behaviour and wellbeing of their assistance dog. The owner should take all reasonable steps to ensure that their assistance dog does not cause physical harm to another, nor damage property.

Animal care such as feeding, watering, health checks, vaccination, and grooming, are also the owner's responsibility. Owners must ensure that their dog does not introduce pests to any of the premises and must be kept on a lead when possible.

- 4.5 If colleagues or members of the public interacting with the assistance dog have allergies or conditions (such as asthma) that may be affected by an assistance dog being within the same location, a discussion should take place to find the best way to accommodate all needs.

Advice can be sought from the department manager and HR should any difficulties be identified in locating dog and colleagues or members of the public near one another.

- 4.6 Exceptions to access will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis. Any review will consider risk management and potential reasonable adjustments.

- 4.7 A risk assessment will be conducted before an assistance dog accompanies an employee to work for the first time and regularly thereafter. This will be conducted by the line manager in conjunction with the user of the assistance dog to cover assistance dog-related aspects.

- 4.8 Emergency evacuation procedures will be established and practiced for any employee with an assistance Dog, with any new or revised considerations built into personal emergency evacuation plans. This should cover scenarios where the employee is both with and without their assistance dog and will include procedures for the safety of both employee and animal.

Workplace and communal space familiarisation for assistance dogs should include emergency evacuation routes. Any appointed fire wardens should be aware of the presence and needs of the assistance dog and its owner.

Any members of the public present during an emergency evacuation can be assisted by staff to safely vacate the premises if aid is required.

- 4.9 Emotional Support Dogs - An assistance dog is a highly trained dog that is prepared and trained to carry out tasks and alerts to mitigate a person's disabilities or life-threatening health condition. An emotional support dog is a dog that offers comfort and companionship by being present, which requires no specialist training. Emotional support dogs are not referenced in law, so it is understood that service providers are not legally obliged to allow access to someone with an emotional

support dog.

5. Consultation

- 5.1** During research into Assistance Dogs, the Council investigated policies held by other Local Authorities, public spaces, and places of education such as the University of Hertfordshire. The Council also discussed the requirements with disability advocates who work with Assistance Dogs, spoke to individuals across our Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise, and received feedback to ensure their policies are suitable for all who the Equality Act applies to.
- 5.2** The input from an advocate with an in-depth knowledge of legislation was insightful for how we should implement this policy to ensure it is not discriminating and receiving training from Assistance Dogs UK helps us to ensure all staff are trained to understand the policy. It was beneficial to utilise other Local Authorities policies and schemes that are in place to give equality to all that use their services and learn from any adjustments needed.

6. Monitoring and Review

- 6.1** This policy will be monitored by Community Advice and Support Services on a bi-annual basis or when new legislation and guidance is published. The purpose of the monitoring will be to ensure that the original aims of the policy are met, and where this is not the case appropriate mechanisms put in place to ensure a solution is found and lessons learned.
- This policy will be reviewed every two years to assess if it is still relevant and fit for purpose. The process for reviewing the policy will be determined by the policy owner and any material changes (10% or more) will require the policy to be submitted for re-approval in-line with the original approval process (Exec/SLT etc).

7. References and Resources

The Equality Act (2010)

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents>

Assistance Dogs UK

<https://www.assistancedogs.org.uk/the-law/>