



Policy Document

PLACEMENT WITH DOGS



Document Control

Document Title: PLACEMENT WITH DOGS

Summary

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Document Approvals

This document requires the following approvals.

Name	Title	Date of Issue	Version Number
CSC SMT	HEAD OF SERVICE	28/9/17	V0.01

Components of Your Policy

Contents Page (Optional)

Consisting of:

- Table including list of section/sub-section headings and page numbers

Executive Summary (Optional)

Consisting of:

- Synopsis including the documents aims
- Whom the document is applicable to
- If new document, reason for development
- Documents to be read in conjunction with

1. Introduction (Mandatory)

Consisting of:

- Rationale stating why the document is necessary. It will include reference to any relevant guidelines, statutory requirements or other recommendations
- Scope; this defines for whom and where the document will apply and whether a corporate or local procedure supports the implementation of the policy
- The major underlying principles on which the document is based.

2. Policy (Mandatory)

Consisting of:

- Actual content of the policy. A policy document may include several sub-headings under this topic.

3. Process for Monitoring Compliance and Effectiveness of the Policy Document (Mandatory)

Consisting of:

- An outline of the proposed methodology and approach for the review of effectiveness and/or compliance with required standards

4. Policy Review Date (Mandatory)

Consisting of:

- Date policy will be reviewed

5. Glossary of Terms (Optional)

Consisting of:

- Definition of technical or specialised terminology used within the document

Term	Meaning

6. Supporting Documents (Optional)

Consisting of:

- Details of any supporting/linked documents that should be considered to enable effective application and utilisation of the policy document.

7. References (Optional)

Consisting of:

- A list of documents referred to in the main body of text

8. Appendices (Mandatory, if mentioned in other sections)

Consisting of:

- Additional material necessary to the delivery of the policy document requirements
- Implementation plan
- Equality Impact Assessment

Placements with Dog-owning Families (Foster Carers)

SCOPE OF THIS POLICY

This policy applies to applicants to foster and approved foster carers. It details the assessment process in order that dog owners can demonstrate that they are responsible and above all prioritise the welfare of the child. It also details the breed of dangerous dogs that under no circumstances would a child be placed with.

RELEVANT LEGISLATION AND GUIDANCE

Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005

Adoption and Children Act 2002 Guidance (2011), Chapter 3

Fostering Regulations 2011/ amends 2013

Fostering Standards 2011

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1. Introduction

1.1 This policy is based closely on the BAAF/Coram 'Dogs and Pets in Fostering and Adoption' (Adams 2015)

1.2 Many foster carers own dogs. The Baaf Practice Note 42 states:

"Adopting rigid policies in relation to households which have dogs could exclude many potential substitute families who have much to offer children in need of family placements".

As a general rule, risk needs to be managed, not avoided, and statutory guidance in fostering reminds us that whilst foster carers should 'avoid unnecessary risk, excessive caution is unhelpful' (DoE 2011)

Rochdale's policy, which will be applied by the Fostering Service, is based on the principle that the presence of a dog in a household may often benefit children placed in a number of ways. However, potential or approved foster carers must be able to demonstrate that they are responsible dog owners, and must be committed to placing the welfare of any child in their care above all other considerations.

In considering and assessing risk that this is proportionate

'.....just over 1,00 dog-inflicted injuries to children under the age of 10, which compares with 35,000 incident of children under four falling down the stairs, and 50,000 children under 14 being admitted to accident and emergency because of burns or scalds' (Child Alert 2014)

Policy The policy of the Department is:

- To safeguard and promote the welfare of the child and to ensure that this is of paramount importance;
- To objectively assess what the risks are from a specific animal and not to make assumptions based on the personal preferences or prejudices of individual members of staff;
- To identify and verify the owner's arrangements for the care of the animal and the extent to which they guard against potential risks and accidents;
- To seek evidence from observations and information provided by the owners, supported by evidence wherever possible, that they are responsible in their attitudes and actions as dog owners;
- To identify the owner's intended action if problems around pets were to arise once a child is placed;
- To make it clear to dog owners that the burden of evidence rests with them that the animal presents no serious risk. The owner may be asked to provide a statement from a qualified Veterinary Surgeon or animal behaviourist concerning the safety of an animal which we believe may be dangerous in the company of children;
- To advise potential foster carers that they will not be registered or approved for the care of children if they own a dog listed as dangerous in legislation, and therefore banned. Further information on banned dogs can be found in **Appendix A – what is a banned Dog?**

- To understand that all animals present potential risks and to ensure that owners have strategies for managing these if and when they arise.

It will be appropriate in some circumstances to seek information and advice from an Independent Dog Assessor

3. Risk Assessment of Dogs

The general principles to be applied when assessing risk are as follows:

- A child must never be placed in a household with a dog listed in the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 (amended in 1997), but in the case of other breeds the approach should be to assess the individual animal's temperament and characteristics, taking into account the dog owner, how they were brought up and trained.
- Workers should be cautious about ascribing general characteristics to a breed;
- Workers are not expected to carry out in-depth assessments of dogs, but it will be useful for them to obtain information on certain key areas; the Health and Safety Assessment form and Dog Ownership Questionnaire are two of the tools which should be used for this purpose;
- In addition to the assessment carried out on the animal, it is also important to assess the owners in terms of their ability to control the dog and the practical steps they take to minimise any potential health and safety issues relating to owning a dog; are they mindful of the risks, and take appropriate measures to manage and reduce them?
- If a more detailed assessment is considered advisable, the worker should consider approaching an independent assessor for further help.

A report from the veterinary surgery used by the owners may also be useful. Similarly if they have used the services of an animal behaviourist, it would be helpful to receive a report. The social worker may feel that to commission such a report if one is not already available may be desirable.

4. When should Assessments be Undertaken?

Assessments will be required in the following circumstances:

- When a request to be considered as a foster carer is received;
- Whenever a new dog is introduced to the household of foster carers who have already been approved.

5. Social Worker's Assessment

Social workers need to make an informed assessment of each animal in the household and to identify the role the dog plays in relation to its owners. Owners should be expected to provide evidence wherever possible (e.g. vaccination certificate etc)

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- Is the dog kept as a family pet, working dog, for breeding, guard dog etc? This may affect the owner's attitude towards the dog;
- Confirm what breed the dog is or what is known of the animal's ancestry if a cross-breed;
- How did the family acquire the dog? (e.g. from a breeder, pet shop, rescue centre etc);
- Older dogs acquired from rescue centres often have a history of neglect, ill treatment or abandonment. This may have affected the dog's behaviour;
- How long has the dog lived with the family? Is this its first home? Dogs with persistent difficulties may have been re-homed more than once. A recently acquired dog may not yet have displayed the problems which led to the re-homing;
- Who looks after the dog and is seen by the dog as "pack leader"? This person will need to be responsible for maintaining the dog's routine as far as possible when family life changes as a result of a child being placed;
- Feeding arrangements - is dog food kept out of reach of a child? Are dog utensils and human utensils kept separately? Is the dog allowed to beg when the humans are eating?
- Sleeping arrangements - where does the dog sleep? For reasons of both hygiene and safety it may be inadvisable for the dog to sleep at the end of the child's bed or in the child's bedroom;
- Exercise and toileting - how and when is the dog exercised? Where is the dog allowed to relieve itself and what are the "cleaning up" arrangements?
- Physical space - is there enough space within the home and garden to comfortably accommodate the dog/s and child/ren? Which areas are out-of-bounds for dogs?
- How is the dog's health addressed? Is it vaccinated and wormed regularly? Is it treated for fleas etc regularly?
- Does the home appear hygienic and free from the odour of pets?
- Observe how the dog behaves when you visit. Is it overly defensive, nervous or aggressive? Is it excessively friendly, excitable and demanding of attention? How do the owners manage this? Does the dog respond to the owner's commands? How does the owner describe the dog's temperament, its behaviour to other visitors, children, other dogs?
- Has the dog ever bitten any person or other animal, and in what circumstances?
- Clarify the dog's age. Older dogs may find it more difficult to cope with young children running around; younger dogs may still be unruly and boisterous;
- Explore how the family would cope if it became necessary to re-home the dog;
- If the family has more than one dog all the above questions must be asked, but it will also be important to understand how the dogs relate to each other and that the 'pack leader' is the owner .

6. Implications for Placement

Social workers also need to encourage potential carers to consider the possible issues there may be for a child and to understand the implications for placement. The same issues will need to be considered again more specifically when a possible match is identified.

- Is the child used to dogs? What breed/s?
- Does the child's culture view dogs in a certain light? (e.g. are they considered "unclean"?)
- Does the child have a fear of dogs? All dogs or specific dogs?
- What associations do dogs have for the child?
- Has the child been known to mistreat animals?
- Does the child have any mobility difficulties, known allergies or other health issues which might make it unsafe or unsuitable for them to be placed in a dog-owning household?

7. Conclusion

The approach of the Fostering Services to placing children within dog-owning households will be based on comprehensive assessments of:

- The potential risk posed by a specific animal;
- The owner's attitude and approach to owning a dog;
- The child's capacity to live in a household where there is a dog.

Such assessments, which should be evidence-based as far as possible, will be vital when Fostering Panels consider the applications of foster carers

They will also be important in terms of enabling a child's social worker to consider the appropriateness of placing a child in a household where there is a dog.

Appendix A: What is a Banned Dog?

The following information is taken from a leaflet published by Defra called "Control of Dogs, The Law and You".

"Whether your dog is a banned type depends on what your dog actually looks like, rather than the breed or name by which it is called (whether a crossbreed or not).

The law refers to four kinds of dog which are banned:



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- *Pit Bull Terrier;*
- *Japanese Tosa;*
- *Dogo Argentino;*
- *Fila Brasileiro.*

While it is the characteristics of a dog which are most important in judging whether it is banned, such dogs may be called by a number of names.

Pit Bulls can be called:

- *American Staffordshire Terriers (Am Staffs);*
- *Irish Staffordshire Bull Terriers (ISBT);*
- *Irish Blue or Red Nose.*

Also, some kinds of American Bulldogs have been found to be Pit Bulls.

Descriptions of the banned types are on the Defra website (see below).

If your dog fits one of the descriptions, it may be treated as a banned type no matter what type or breed its parents were.

You may not own, breed from, sell, give away or abandon any banned dog. The police may seize your dog if they think it is a banned type.