

## **Private Rented Sector**

### **Local Government and Housing Committee Consultation**

#### **Introduction**

Cats Protection is the UK's largest cat welfare charity. Our Welsh network includes six volunteer-run branches, two adoption centres (Bridgend and Wrexham), as well as eight high-street charity shops which also offer advice on cat care.

Landlords not allowing pets is one of the top five reasons Cats Protection takes in cats for rehoming. The charity launched its Purrfect Landlords campaign in 2018 to encourage landlords to allow responsible tenants to keep pets.

#### **Summary**

- According to private tenants in Wales, the percentage of tenancy agreements which allow pets is 27%. This is the lowest in the UK.
- 94% of Welsh cat owners consider their cat part of the family.
- Due to the low percentage of tenancy agreements which allow pets many responsible tenants must make the heart-breaking decision to give up their pets.
- Cats Protection is calling for a statutory right for responsible pet owners to keep a pet in a rented property.

#### **The importance of allowing pets in the Private Rented Sector (PRS)**

Wales is a nation of cat lovers with 560,000 owned cats in Wales and over one in four households owning one or more cats<sup>1</sup>. Therefore, any proposals to make it easier for tenants in the private rented sector to own or keep their cats will be beneficial to a significant portion of the Welsh population.

There are many benefits of cat ownership. 94% of Welsh cat owners view their cat(s) as part of the family and 90% says their cat(s) bring them joy<sup>2</sup>. When we consider these statistics, it is alarming to think that our Welsh Adoption Centres took in 78 cats (an average of 1 cat every 4 days) as a result of landlords disallowing pets last year.

Pet ownership can also be beneficial to mental health. 38% of owners explicitly state that they got a cat to reduce loneliness/anxiety.<sup>3</sup> Research carried out by Cats Protection and the Mental Health Foundation found that 87% of people who owned a cat felt it had a positive impact on their well-being.<sup>4</sup> A 2021 study<sup>5</sup> explored people's experiences of the role of their

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<sup>1</sup> [cats-report-2022-wales.pdf](#)

<sup>2</sup> [cats-report-2022-wales.pdf](#)

<sup>3</sup> [cats-report-2022-wales.pdf](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Cats marvellous for mental health says survey | Cats Protection](#)

<sup>5</sup> Roxanne D. Hawkins, Emma L. Hawkins & Liesbeth Tip (2021) "I Can't Give Up When I Have Them to Care for": People's Experiences of Pets and Their Mental Health, *Anthrozoös*, 34:4, 543-562

pets in reducing or exacerbating symptoms of their mental health conditions and general well-being. Responses of people with diagnosed mental health conditions and those who self-reported to have been struggling with mental health recently and their relationship with their animals were analysed. The responses were generally positive, and participants stated that owning animals helped alleviate some of their symptoms.

With so many positive benefits to be enjoyed from owning a cat, it is disappointing that a significant number of people feel unable or are prevented from having a cat in their lives due to the type of housing they live in.

### **Perception vs Reality: Pets in rented properties**

According to Cats Protection and Dogs Trust research conducted in 2021<sup>6</sup> in partnership with YouGov, there are inconsistencies between the narratives surrounding allowing pets in rented properties and the realities. For example, the most common reason landlord refuses to allow cats in a rented property is over concern that the cat will cause damage to the floors, walls, furniture or fittings. However, 73% of the landlords we surveyed who allowed cats in the property reported no issues. In most cases, if damage to the property did occur, the cost should be covered by the security deposit.<sup>7</sup>

There are also inconsistencies around the number of landlords who claim to allow pets and the actual amount of properties advertised as pet-friendly in the private rented sector. At a UK level, 46% of the landlords surveyed stated that they allowed pets, however, the proportion of tenants saying their tenancy agreement allows pets is lower than this at 31% – **in Wales this figure drops to 27% which is the lowest in the UK.** In addition, only 9% of properties in the UK were advertised as pet friendly.<sup>8</sup>

The barriers that are put up for those who rent mean that too often cat owning renters face the heart-breaking situation of being forced to give up their beloved cat because of a lack of pet-friendly rented homes. Ultimately, the findings of this survey suggest that there is a need to create a statutory right for responsible renters to keep pets to ensure that both renters and landlords are given a fair deal. Cats Protection is keen to discuss this further with the Local Government and Housing Committee.

### **Cats in the PRS: Cats Protection's work and suggested actions**

Cats Protection is campaigning to ensure that responsible tenants can have the opportunity to enjoy the companionship of a cat by calling for a statutory right for responsible tenants to keep pets. Cats Protection strongly believes that people who own pets should be protected from blanket bans.

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<sup>6</sup> Pets and Landlords 2021, YouGov

<sup>7</sup> Pets and Landlords 2021, YouGov

<sup>8</sup> Pets and Landlords 2021, YouGov

Blanket “no-pet” clauses are a significant barrier to cat ownership. It is estimated that up to 1.5 million more cats could be rehomed if all landlords allowed pets<sup>9</sup>. Cats Protection believes introducing a right for responsible tenants to keep pets will stop tenants from being unfairly excluded from pet ownership simply because of their type of rented home. Cats Protection also believes that a statutory right for responsible tenants to keep pets should benefit tenants in existing and new tenancies and therefore recommends any changes to the law should also apply to tenancy renewals.

Cats Protection believes it is not reasonable for a landlord to refuse consent for tenants to keep a pet out of fear their property might be damaged, when evidence shows this is most likely not going to be the case. Some landlords might feel like they need extra measures in place before they would be happy to allow pet owning tenants. Cats Protection supports reasonable measures to encourage landlords to allow responsible tenants to keep pets. The charity advises cat friendly landlords to include pet policies in their tenancy which could include a clause limiting the number of cats allowed per property. However, with the backdrop of the cost of living crisis, we need to be mindful that any extra costs to tenants are not excessive and result in those on low incomes being unable to keep their cats. Cats Protection is already seeing people relinquishing cats due to financial reasons and home evictions.

In Wales, as well as in the rest of the UK, there is no statutory right to keep a pet in a rented property. On the issue of pets in rented accommodation, the Welsh Government states:

“As elsewhere in the UK, we have not legislated to create a statutory right to keep a pet, landlords and contract-holders are able to agree additional terms covering the keeping of pets. The explanatory information that must be included in written statements of contracts makes it clear that all additional terms must comply with the Consumer Rights Act 2015 regarding fairness. Any pet clause as an additional term in the contract should allow a contract-holder to ask for permission to keep a pet, and the landlord is not allowed to unreasonably refuse the request.”<sup>10</sup>

This means that although there are some protections in place for renters in the event of a pet clause being included in a contract, the inclusion of that clause is entirely optional. Cats Protection is committed to working with the Local Government and Housing Committee to introduce new legislation which is fair and affordable for renters with pets and ensures that landlords feel confident allowing renters with pets in their property. We would like to work with the Local Government and Housing Committee to help introduce legislation which provides responsible renters with a statutory right to keep a pet in a rented property unless there are mitigating circumstances.

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<sup>9</sup> [cats-report-2022-uk.pdf](#)

<sup>10</sup> [Renting homes: frequently asked questions \(landlords\) | GOV.WALES](#)

Cats Protection believes it is important that a cat is kept in a property that is suitable for its needs. The charity does not believe that a property should have a blanket 'no-pet' policy because of its size, location or outdoor space. In most cases, there is a cat suitable for any property, including flats and properties without a garden – it is a case of getting the right cat for the right home. Some cats are actually best suited to living indoors, perhaps due to a disability such as being blind or deaf, or an illness that makes them vulnerable to picking up infections outside. Other cats just prefer the indoor life. Charities such as Cats Protection can offer assistance to landlords and tenants to help match the right cat to the most suitable home. The charity believes that the needs of the cat should be considered when deciding if a property is suitable.

Refusal to allow pets in a property should be reasonable and be based on the current tenant and their pet, not based on the landlords' previous experiences with pet owners. A Pet CV, like Cats Protection and Dogs Trust's joint Pet CV, could be used to help determine if the property is suitable for the pet and if the landlord is reasonably refusing the tenant to keep a pet. It also highlights that the owner is a responsible pet owner to landlords and letting agents. The CV sets out details about the animal including if they are neutered, microchipped, or vaccinated and information about their general behaviour and temperament. A Pet CV can be a vital tool to help landlords assess if a tenant is a responsible pet owner.<sup>11</sup>

### Conclusion

Cats Protection believes there is potential in Wales to create a partnership between landlords and renters which is fair and reasonable for both sides. Cats Protection also advocates a more pet-friendly private rented sector because pet ownership can have a positive impact on the tenant's life and the landlords by allowing tenants to feel more at home in the property which can result in tenants potentially staying longer, making business sense for landlords. Finally it will also help thousands of cats find new homes.

For further information please email: [advocacy@Cats.org.uk](mailto:advocacy@Cats.org.uk)

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<sup>11</sup> [Private tenants | Purrfect Landlords | Cats Protection](#)