

Battersea response to the Local Government and Housing Committee's inquiry on the private rented sector

About Battersea Dogs & Cats Home

Battersea will always be here for every dog and cat. We offer our love and expert care to the animals who need us, and have done for over 160 years.

We take them in regardless of their age, breed, or medical condition and without any judgement. Staff across our three centres give each and every animal the specialised care they need, getting to know their characters and quirks so we can find them a new home that's just right for them.

We learn so much, every day, by caring for dogs and cats in our three centres. All the knowledge we gather helps us to improve the lives of the animals we will never meet, through our work with other rescue organisations. Through Battersea's Global Programmes we work with rescue and rehoming centres both across the UK and overseas, since 2018 we have awarded grants to Welsh rescues totalling £74,085.

We always aim to make the lives of dogs and cats better, this includes working to ensure that where possible they do not need the direct help of an organisation like Battersea, especially if they are already in a loving home. This is why we have been campaigning under the banner of Pet-Friendly Properties since 2018 to reduce unnecessary relinquishment of animals by loving owners because they cannot find suitable accommodation. So, we help people make informed choices when getting or caring for a pet, we provide training and welfare advice, and we campaign for changes in the law when we see that dogs and cats, or their owners deserve better.

We do all of this because we want to be here for every dog and cat, wherever they are, for as long as they need us.

Key statistics

- Housing issues are the second most common reason that dogs are relinquished to Battersea, with more than 200 dogs a year coming through our gates because of landlord restrictions.
- Demand for pet friendly accommodation in the private rented 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.¹
- Mars Petcare survey of 1000 adults who have ever owned a pet whilst renting found that 1 in 10 pet owning tenants are currently 'hiding' an animal from a landlord. With 22% of those pet owners being evicted due to hiding a pet.²
- In 2022 Battersea helped 2,278 dogs and 2,253 cats across its three centres.
- Stray dog intake doubled to 849, compared to 422 in 2021. Stray cat intake also increased, boosted by many kittens being born at our centres – 133 compared to 50 in 2021.
- Through Battersea's Academy we work with international rescues to improve practice to ensure rescues are well run, and dogs and cats receive the best level of care and positive welfare. By the end of 2022, we had engaged with 932 individuals, representing 275 rescues in 45 countries, including 159 in the UK, and delivered 110 programmes, webinars and check-in & chat sessions.
- Since 2018, Battersea has made over 200 grants to rescue and rehoming organisations, 127 of which were awarded in the UK. £74,085 worth of grants have been awarded to rescue and rehoming centres in Wales. These provide organisations with vital support to improve their welfare standards, make improvements at their sites, conduct neutering and vaccination programmes, and provide vet care, food, equipment.

¹ [1553-Pet-Friendly-Properties-Report_AW_V2.indd \(bdch.org.uk\)](#)

² [Petiquette Guide to Rentals and Pet Ownership | Mars, Incorporated](#)



Battersea welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Committee's inquiry. We have however limited our response to the two discussion points that affect dogs and cats:

- *Barriers to accessing the private rented sector including challenges facing people with pets and how effectively the private rented sector is regulated.*
- *How effectively the private rented sector is regulated.*

Private rented sector a barrier to pet ownership

Though extensive research Battersea has ascertained that renting is a significant barrier to pet ownership across the UK including in Wales. In some cases, tenants have had to give their much-loved pets to organisations like Battersea, with housing issues being the second most common reason that dogs are relinquished to Battersea, and more than 200 dogs a year coming through our gates because of landlord restrictions. This is a growing issue as the private rented sector (PRS) is now the second largest tenure group in the UK, after owner-occupier, with 4.6 million households (23% of all households in the UK)³ now renting their home from 2.6 million private landlords.⁴ Data from the 2021 census showed that there are 230,825 privately rented households in Wales,⁵ accounting for 17.1% of the Welsh housing stock up from 14% in March 2020.⁶ Even with the increase in dependence on the rental sector, housing website Zoopla sees only 8% of landlords currently advertising homes as suitable for pets across the UK,⁷ which suggests that only approximately 18,466 rental properties in Wales are designated as pet friendly.

This is despite a quarter of the UK population having a cat or dog and 76% of UK private tenants either already owning a pet or aspiring to do so,⁸ indeed the PDSA estimate that as of 2022 there are 1.4 million owned dogs and cats in Wales.⁹ Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in increased demand for puppies and kittens as people found themselves at home with more time to dedicate to a pet. Pets4Homes reported a 104% rise in puppies for sale compared with the year prior at the peak of lockdown in May 2020, with 420 prospective buyers for each advert for a puppy,¹⁰ this is compared with 125 potential buyers for each advert of a dog in 2022.¹¹ 35% of young adults (aged 24-35) have already become or are planning to become pet owners since the pandemic, with 19% collecting a new pet during lockdown,¹² and during the height of the pandemic in 2020, 35% of applicants to Battersea to rehome were from people who rented their home.

A survey by Shelter Cymru¹³ in 2022 found that 57% of landlords surveyed said they do not or would prefer not to let to people with pets. Many landlords are hesitant to allow pets because of a perceived risk of damage to their property and concerns around anti-social behaviour. A Battersea commissioned survey of private landlords across England and Wales found that landlords' biggest concerns when renting to pet owners were potential damage to their property (60% of respondents), a pet urinating/creating a mess (40% of respondents) and the animals 'annoying neighbours' (22% of respondents).¹⁴ However, these concerns may be unwarranted. In a UK wide survey of private renters only 3% of dog owners stated that their pet had ever been the subject of a noise complaint and only 3% said their dog had ever damaged property.¹⁵ This highlights the to challenge perceptions around pets in rented properties, and for a legislative framework that is balance and supports good pet owners, while giving landlords enough methods of redress that they feel confident renting to people with pets.

³ [Housing, England and Wales - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/housing/bulletins/housingenglandandwales/census2021)

⁴ [Should I use a letting agent or rent my property privately? \(axa.co.uk\)](https://www.axa.co.uk/should-i-use-a-letting-agent-or-rent-my-property-privately)

⁵ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/housing/bulletins/housingenglandandwales/census2021>

⁶ <https://stats.wales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Housing/Dwelling-Stock-Estimates/dwellingstockestimatespercentages-by-year-tenure>

⁷ <https://www.zoopla.co.uk/discover/renting/renting-with-pets/>

⁸ https://bdch.org.uk/files/BATTERSEA_Pet-Friendly-Properties-Report.pdf

⁹ [Pet Population 2022 | PFMA](#)

¹⁰ [Pandemic Pets: How Covid-19 affected pet sales and pricing in 2020 | Pets4Homes](#)

¹¹ [The UK Pet Industry Report Vol.4 - Google Slides](#)

¹² <https://www.pfma.org.uk/news/pfma-confirms-dramatic-rise-in-pet-acquisition-among-millennials-#:~:text=Londoners%20are%20the%20most%20likely,planning%20to%20make%20the%20change.>

¹³ [Can I get a home? Barriers to getting a private rented home in Wales - Shelter Cymru](#)

¹⁴ Battersea commissioned survey of 950 National Residential Landlords Association (NRLA) landlords across England and Wales in July 2021

¹⁵ [1553-Pet-Friendly-Properties-Report_AW_V2.indd \(bdch.org.uk\)](#)



The cost-of-living crisis has also impacted access to pet friendly rentals. According to the Office for National Statistics, rent in Wales rose by 4.4% in 2022, the highest annual percentage change since 2010.¹⁶ In an increasingly competitive rental market, and as there are no model statements or model written statements relevant to Wales that specifically reference pet ownership, many responsible pet owners are finding themselves at a disadvantage for simply having a pet. Sadly, for many, this leads to a heart-breaking choice between renting a home suitable or keeping their pet. Approximately 1 in 10 dogs and cats are brought to Battersea due to pet restrictions in rental properties.¹⁷

With a rise in pet owners and at a time when more people rely on the private rented sector, it is important to ensure sufficient pet friendly rented accommodation in Wales so as not to exclude non-homeowners or young people from the benefits of pet ownership.

Benefits of pet ownership

In 2018, Battersea launched our Pet Friendly Properties campaign, to advocate for more balanced pet policies in rented accommodation. Our research^{18,19} included identifying and reviewing the benefits to not only pet owners, but also landlords and wider society, of more balanced pet policies in housing.

Battersea identified that landlords benefit from pet ownership as tenants with pets tend to stay longer in their properties, with pet owners 60% more likely than non-pet owners to develop stronger community ties. The local economy stands to profit too as pet owners spend money on food, toys, and services such as vets, grooming and dog walking in their local area. Pet ownership brings significant health benefits. Dog walking is great exercise and can lead to reduced obesity and lower cholesterol, protecting against heart disease and diabetes.²⁰ Owning a pet has also been shown to alleviate social isolation and improve mental health,²¹ with Battersea research revealing 75% of the British public said their rescue pet helped them cope during the nationwide quarantine.²² It is unsurprising then that Coastal Housing in Swansea found that a more flexible approach to pet ownership enabled them to more easily tackle other issues faced by tenants, such as isolation and loneliness.²³ As a result of such health benefits, pet owners make 15% fewer visits to a doctor for both physical and mental health issues, saving the NHS an estimated £2.45 billion across the UK annually.

Removing barriers to pet ownership

Pet friendly housing policies clearly have wide-ranging benefit, and they keep more animals in loving homes, preventing responsible owners from having to make heart-breaking decisions to give up their pet purely because of the lack of suitable housing. Similarly, a Censuswide poll commissioned by the Companion Animal Welfare Group Wales (CAWG) revealed that 79% of the Welsh public supported promoting pet friendly policies across all housing in Wales.²⁴

The Renting Homes (Wales) Act 2016 came into force in December 2022 but there is little reference to pet ownership included within the associated guidance for this legislation. While Battersea welcomed the Welsh Government producing the Renting Homes (Model Written Statements) (Wales) Regulations 2022,²⁵ explanatory information and guidance,²⁶ the model written statements as currently drafted class pets as 'additional terms' and therefore there is no legal standardised clause reviewing the possibility of pet ownership. It is therefore the landlords and contract-holders' joint responsibility to discuss and agree if pets are allowed in the property. This assumes that there will be a balanced contract negotiation between the landlord and potential contract-holder, which is not always the case with these types of contract negotiations, particularly with the recent changes in the

¹⁶ [Index of Private Housing Rental Prices, UK - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://ons.gov.uk)

¹⁷ [1553-Pet-Friendly-Properties-Report_AW_V2.indd \(bdch.org.uk\)](https://bdch.org.uk)

¹⁸ <https://bdch.org.uk/files/Pet-Friendly-Properties-Report.pdf>

¹⁹ http://www.apgocats.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/APGOCATS_Loneliness-Report.pdf

²⁰ [Pet-Friendly-Properties-Report.pdf \(bdch.org.uk\)](https://bdch.org.uk)

²¹ [APGOCATS Loneliness Report_V9.indd](https://bdch.org.uk)

²² Battersea commissioned survey run in 2020 with OnePoll.

²³ [Pet-Friendly-Properties-Report.pdf \(bdch.org.uk\)](https://bdch.org.uk)

²⁴ Polling commissioned by Blue Cross on behalf of CAWG and undertaken by Censuswide. Total sample size was 2,004 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 6 - 10 November 2020.

²⁵ [The Renting Homes \(Model Written Statements of Contract\) \(Wales\) Regulations 2022 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://legislation.gov.uk)

²⁶ [Renting Homes | Sub-topic | GOV.WALES](https://gov.wales)



rental market and the effect of the cost-of-living crisis.^{27,28} Not having a standardised policy potentially enables landlord to either refuse pets, without due consideration, or draft a pet policy that is restrictive to the contract-holder. A standardised policy, with a presumption in favour of allowing pet ownership requests except where there are reasonable, proportionate, and legitimate grounds for refusal would allow for a balance between the needs and rights of both parties; if accompanied by legislative protections for landlords, such as the right to insist upon insurance.

By contrast, the revised Model Tenancy Agreement in England includes a stated presumption in favour of allowing pet ownership, while making clear landlords can refuse an application if there are compelling grounds to do so. Furthermore, the Renters (Reform) Bill²⁹ plans to ensure that “landlords do not unreasonably withhold consent” for pet ownership in England. This approach is supported by the majority of the UK public, with 72% agreeing that landlords should review requests to keep a pet on a case-by-case basis.³⁰ There is also cross-party support in the Senedd; in July 2022, Luke Fletcher MS led a debate³¹ on a Member’s Legislative Proposal calling for a ban on “No Pet” clauses in rented accommodation. 30 members supported the motion, including both Leaders of the Welsh Conservatives and Plaid Cymru and all Welsh Labour MS’s outside of Government.³² The stated will of the Senedd is clear. Whilst the regulatory system is different in Wales, in comparison to England and Scotland, a balance needs to be struck between the needs of both the contract-holder and landlord and this should be reflected in Wales’s model written statement.

Battersea understands that not all housing is suitable for pets, and we are therefore not seeking changes that would require all landlords to legally allow pets. Instead, the flexible option of a standardised pet policy is more appropriate. A clause, like Section C ‘Use Of The Property, Pets And Prohibited Conduct’ of the UK Government’s Model Tenancy Agreement³³ could be drafted to class pets as supplementary terms, under the new regulatory framework. Alternatively, a standalone pet policy could be published by Welsh Government and approved for use by property owners and contract-holders. Battersea created such a policy, to support more balanced discussions between landlords and contract-holders, the template is available for use by both contract-holders and landlords on our website.³⁴ Such a policy could be adapted in necessary and adopted by the Welsh Government as part of the new framework which could be translated to Welsh and included on the Welsh Government website.

To help alleviate concerns around damage to properties, landlords in Wales are able to charge slightly higher deposits to cover damage caused by pets.³⁵ However, Battersea’s survey of private landlords in England and Wales found that 42% of landlords felt proof of insurance for additional damage to their property, would help them accept pets.³⁶ We believe this is a fairer method of landlord address than pet deposits, as the insurer acting as an impartial arbiter removes the potential for accusations of deposits being withheld unfairly. Through our work with relevant stakeholders, Battersea has found that there are many potential ways insurance products could be created to support pet ownership in the private rented sector. Similarly, Battersea welcomed the draft Renters (Reform) Bill in England which if passed would allow for pet insurance as a permitted payment, this could be replicated in Wales with an amendment to Schedule 1 Permitted Payment of the Renting Homes (Fees etc.) (Wales) Act 2019.³⁷ Battersea continue to explore pet damage insurance alongside other welfare organisations, estate agents and insurance providers to find solutions that benefit both landlords and private tenants, and we would welcome the opportunity to work with Welsh Government officials on this and pet friendly properties more widely.

²⁷ [The huge problems facing tenants and landlords in the rental market in Wales - Wales Online](#)

²⁸ [Cost of Living: Housing struggle as rent and demand rise - BBC News](#)

²⁹ [Renters \(Reform\) Bill \(parliament.uk\)](#)

³⁰ Battersea commissioned survey of 2001 adults across the UK in April 2022

³¹ [Plenary 06/07/2022 - Welsh Parliament \(senedd.wales\)](#)

³² [Vote Outcomes Plenary 06/07/2022 - Welsh Parliament \(senedd.wales\)](#)

³³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/model-agreement-for-a-shorthold-assured-tenancy>

³⁴ [1565-Tenancy-Pet-Policy.indd \(bdch.org.uk\)](#)

³⁵ https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-10/letting-fees-guidance-for-landlords-and-letting-agents_1.pdf

³⁶ Battersea commissioned survey of 950 NRLA landlords across England and Wales in July 2021

³⁷ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/anaw/2019/2/contents/enacted>