**Assistance Dogs and Other Animals Policy**

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# Introduction

## Policy statement

This policy refers to all animals that may be within the practice which may cause a risk such as an infection control hazard. It predominantly supports those patients and employees who may have the need for an assistance dog, although at [Chapter 4](#_Other_animals) it does also refer to therapy animals, pets and other animals that may visit the organisation.

With regard to assistance dogs, the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995 permits these animals to accompany their owners into most areas of medical facilities. This is as a service user or an employee. It is unlawful for disabled people to be treated less favourably than other people, without justification, in areas such as service provision.

The legal definition of an assistance dog can be found at [Section 2.2](#_Definitions).

In accordance with the [DDA Section 21](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1995/50/section/21), service industries are legally obligated to make all reasonable adjustments to ensure equal access to their services. The DDA only recognises very limited circumstances in which there may be “justification” for treating a disabled person less favourably than other people.

## Status

The organisation aims to design and implement policies and procedures that meet the diverse needs of our service and workforce, ensuring that none are placed at a disadvantage over others, in accordance with the [Equality Act 2010](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents). Consideration has been given to the impact this policy might have regarding the individual protected characteristics of those to whom it applies.

This document and any procedures contained within it are non-contractual and may be modified or withdrawn at any time. For the avoidance of doubt, it does not form part of your contract of employment. Furthermore, this document applies to all employees of the organisation and other individuals performing functions in relation to the organisation such as agency workers, locums and contractors.

# Guidance

##  Requirement

Sheerwater Health Centre is committed to providing services that are equally accessible and responsive to all sections of the community. To that effect, assistance dogs are welcome.

Assistance dogs may also be in training and visits to public spaces will form part of this. Therefore, dogs under training may also be permitted to attend along with their walker or sponsor. This ‘owner’ may not be disabled.

Other types of animals that may attend the organisation are detailed at [Chapter 4](#_Other_animals).

## Definitions

An assistance dog is defined as a dog that has been specially trained to live with and accompany a disabled person carrying out such tasks as prompting them to take medication or assisting them to cross a road.

Legally, the [Equality Act 2010 s173(1)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/section/173?view=plain) defines that an assistance dog is:

1. A dog which has been trained to guide a blind person
2. A dog which has been trained to assist a deaf person
3. A dog which has been trained by a prescribed charity to assist a disabled person who has a disability that consists of epilepsy or otherwise affects the person's mobility, manual dexterity, physical co-ordination or ability to lift, carry or otherwise move everyday objects
4. A dog of a prescribed category which has been trained to assist a disabled person who has a disability (other than one falling within paragraph (c)) of a prescribed kind

Assistance dogs are working dogs that have usually been rigorously trained by the following associations:

* Guide Dogs for the Blind
* Hearing Dogs for Deaf People
* Support Dogs
* Canine Partners
* Dog A.I.D.
* Medical Detection Dogs
* Autism Dogs
* Dogs for Good
* Service Dogs UK
* The Seeing Dogs Alliance
* Veterans with Dogs

Registered assistance dogs are working animals, not pets, and are relied on by their owners for independence. Each charity will have their own agreements outlining the expectations and responsibilities of the owner. They will also regularly monitor the owner and the dog to ensure their expectations are fulfilled.

However, it is important to note that there is no legal requirement for assistance dogs to have been trained by a charity, or for them to carry specific identification, therefore there is no ‘proof’ that can be requested. Without any identity or any proof of training, it is not possible to confirm whether the animal is a pet or an assistance dog.

[Assistance Dogs UK](http://www.assistancedogs.org.uk/) is a charity that provides training and support which has a useful [FAQ page](https://www.assistancedogs.org.uk/faqs/) on this subject.

Further to this, in healthcare settings, there has been a significant growth in the number of working therapy dogs that help people with physical conditions and also assist with mental wellbeing.

The two main classifications of therapy dog are:

* Animal-assisted therapy (AAT), which is delivered in conjunction with other healthcare professionals, is ordinarily goal directed with the outcomes documented and evaluated
* Animal-assisted activity (AAA) is the term used when a handler brings a dog to the patient/resident for general interaction. These dogs are usually owned by the person who is their handler. This is also termed as being an emotional support animal (ESA) and further information on this can be found [here](https://www.esaorguk.com/). ESAs are pets that are required for a person's ongoing mental health treatment or for their hidden disability.

Due to the nature of primary care, therapy dogs are unlikely to be needed within this organisation. Likewise, ESAs do not have the same legal recognition as an assistance dog.

The [Equality and Human Rights Commission](https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/assistance-dogs-a-guide-for-all-businesses.pdf) provides useful guidance on the legal standing and how businesses should comply with the Equality Act 2010.

## Policy

Assistance dogs are able to enter most areas of this organisation whereas other types of animal are not.

A risk assessment has been conducted and it has been deemed that, for infection control purposes, the treatment room areas [include any other area deemed inappropriate] are not permissible for any assistance dog to enter. This risk assessment is also to consider the safety of the staff and whether employees have allergies and/or any phobias towards animals.

In these circumstances, the owner will be requested to ensure that alternative arrangements are made for the short period whilst they are receiving treatment. In these instances, the patient should be advised that it is our wish to minimise any separation time from their dog.

Further information on risk management, can be sought at:

* [Risk and Issues Guidance Document](https://practiceindex.co.uk/gp/forum/resources/risk-and-issues-guidance-document.1568/?fromcat=106)
* [Risk Assessment Guidance Document](https://practiceindex.co.uk/gp/forum/resources/risk-assessment-guidance-document.1519/?fromcat=106)

## Maintaining infection control measures

The organisation will pay particular attention to the maintenance of infection control following any animal having been on the premises. If necessary, should there be any animal body fluids that need to be cleared, this should be treated as the normal procedure as for human waste. Personal protective equipment should be worn and all surfaces cleaned with [insert cleaning product].

Following attendance by an animal to the organisation, the cleaning staff are to be made aware of any areas that the assistance dog visited. This will enable them to provide a higher level of cleaning to these areas.

A risk assessment template is at [Annex A](#_Annex_A_–) and this details all types of visiting animal.

Further reading can be sought within the [Infection Prevention Control Policy](https://practiceindex.co.uk/gp/forum/resources/infection-prevention-control-policy-ipc.700/).

## Clinicians’ responsibilities

Physical contact with a dog by clinical staff will be resisted during any consultation or examination.

All clinical staff must ensure good hand washing with soap and water prior to contact with an assistance dog; this will ensure the safety of the dog. Furthermore, all clinical staff must ensure good hand washing with soap and water after any contact with an assistance dog to ensure the safety of other patients.

This may include patients who:

* Have an allergy to animals, especially dogs
* Are immunosuppressed
* Have a phobia of dogs
* Another medical reason

Following any attendance of an animal at the surgery, all clinical staff must be mindful and considerate of other patients.

## Non-clinicians’ responsibilities

Other staff must ensure that following any physical contact with the animal they also promote good hand hygiene.

## Owner’s responsibilities

The owner has a responsibility to ensure that their dog is well behaved and supervised throughout the visit.

Additionally, they are to ensure that their dog:

* Is physically fit before visiting the organisation. If dogs become ill, diagnosis and treatment by a vet must be sought
* Is kept on a lead throughout the visit
* Is clearly identified as an assistance dog
* Is discouraged from jumping, scratching and licking
* Does not come into contact with open wounds
* Is of an acceptable hygienic standard, i.e., not wet, muddy etc.
* Is exercised and has had its toileting and feeding requirements met
* Has claws trimmed to reduce the risk of scratches
* Is regularly groomed and checked for signs of infection or other illness
* Has received the relevant inoculations and worm and flea treatments are up to date
* Does not toilet within the grounds of the practice. Should there be an ‘accident’, then the patient is to clean up the mess. If this is not possible, then they are to inform a member of staff due to this presenting an infection control risk and also being unpleasant. It should be noted that cleaning costs may be borne by the owner of the animal
* The owner is legally responsible for their dog whilst on the premises. In the unlikely instance that a trained assistance dog injures a member of the public then recourse would need to be taken against the owner

## Injury sustained from an assistance dog

Should an animal bite and injure any person, first aid measures should be made and further information can be found on the NHS webpage titled [Animal and human bites](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/animal-and-human-bites/). Furthermore, the [First Aid Policy](https://practiceindex.co.uk/gp/forum/resources/first-aid-policy.833/) should be consulted. Should the injury be significant, then advice from the [Clinical Guidance Document – Medical Emergencies](https://practiceindex.co.uk/gp/forum/resources/clinical-guidance-document-medical-emergencies.906/) may be sought.

Additionally, a significant event is to be raised. Should the police become involved, then the Care Quality Commission (CQC) is to be informed as this will be a notifiable incident. Further information can be sought in both the [Significant Event and Incident Policy](https://practiceindex.co.uk/gp/forum/resources/significant-event-and-incident-policy-england.1762/) and the CQC webpage titled [When you need to tell us about police involvement](https://www.cqc.org.uk/guidance-providers/notifications/police-involvement-incident-notification-form).

## Further information and training

Further reading relating to disability and access can be found in the [Accessible Information Standards Policy](https://practiceindex.co.uk/gp/forum/resources/accessible-information-standard-policy.1361/).

# Employees with an assistance dog

## Requests

As Sheerwater Health Centre have a responsibility to our existing employees, should a member of staff suddenly need or be considering the need to apply for an assistance dog, their application must be discussed with the practice manager at the earliest opportunity. The practice manager will seek advice from the occupational health team and a work place assessment is likely to be required. The same principles will apply to any new starting employees.

Prior to any assistance dog arriving with the employee, arrangements will be made with the relevant charity to carry out appropriate training with other staff in the organisation.

## Employee’s responsibilities

To ensure that day-to-day operational activity is not affected at the organisation, the employee and assistance dog owner will be required to ensure that their dog is well behaved at all times.

To ensure that infection prevention and control is being maintained, the employee is to ensure that they clean any mess that the dog may leave or, should this be difficult due to their disability, the employee is then to inform another member of the team to request support.

## Reasonable adjustments

The practice manager will ensure that specific space will be made available for the dog and its bed. Changes to working hours will be considered to allow for short breaks for exercise and toileting purposes.

# Other animals

## Therapy dog

The Royal College of Nursing (RCN) document titled [Working with Dogs in Health Care Settings](https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&ved=2ahUKEwjd58Pkl9H9AhWEilwKHX18AV8QFnoECAoQAQ&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.rcn.org.uk%2F-%2Fmedia%2FRoyal-College-Of-Nursing%2FDocuments%2FPublications%2F2019%2FDecember%2F007-925.pdf&usg=AOvVaw0NFUf-Bk8uAVlC6SMDcx_p) discusses therapy dogs and animal assisted intervention and how this supports patients within a healthcare setting.

Due to the nature of primary care, it is unlikely that there is any need for therapy dogs although larger multidisciplinary health centres may utilise therapy dogs. This is also detailed at [Section 2.2](#_Definition).

## Pets

The RCN’s [Working with Dogs in Health Care Settings](https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&ved=2ahUKEwjd58Pkl9H9AhWEilwKHX18AV8QFnoECAoQAQ&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.rcn.org.uk%2F-%2Fmedia%2FRoyal-College-Of-Nursing%2FDocuments%2FPublications%2F2019%2FDecember%2F007-925.pdf&usg=AOvVaw0NFUf-Bk8uAVlC6SMDcx_p) also decrees the following with regard to patients’ pet dogs:

From time-to-time people may make a request to bring a pet dog to visit a person in a health care setting.

While we understand that people may value having time with their pet dog, it is important to recognise that many healthcare settings are unfamiliar environments for most dogs and can be very unsettling for any dog that has not been temperamentally screened and trained to deal with a very wide range of environments. Similarly, it is difficult for staff to have to deal with the requirement to assess a dog’s health and vaccination history.

It is therefore recommended that, except in exceptional circumstances, pets are not permitted into healthcare settings. This includes staff members. However, should a pet be allowed into the practice, at Sheerwater Health Centre, we will request that the owner completes a risk assessment (see [Annex A](#_Annex_A_–)) to detail their knowledge and requirements of the pet. This risk assessment is to also confirm if employees have any allergies or phobias to animals.

The owner’s responsibilities remain the same as detailed at [Section 2.7](#_Owner’s_responsibilities).

## Visiting animals

This non-admittance is also to be extended to other pets, such as neighbourhood cats that may simply visit the practice. Therefore, at Sheerwater Health Centre, all animals, except assistance dogs, are not permitted and they are to be discouraged from entering the practice.

Or [Delete if not appropriate]

At Sheerwater Health Centre, we allow [insert animals] into the building as both visitors and therapy animals. As part of the risk assessment, we have agreed that this is acceptable and have mitigated those risks associated with animals within the practice.

We have discussed this with our insurer.

## Injury sustained from a non-assistance animal

Actions are to be taken as detailed above at [Section 2.8](#_Injury_sustained_from).

Should a pet animal injure any person, then recourse is to be taken against the pet owner.

[Delete if not appropriate]

If a visiting animal that is allowed into the practice as detailed above in [Section 4.3](#_Visiting_animals) causes injury, then it is likely that any litigation will be sought against the practice due to the partners having allowed the animal to be on the premises and, as such, they will have responsibility for this.

# Summary

While the organisation will consider our patient’s needs, this policy dictates that animals other than assistance dogs may not be permitted within the organisation. It is accepted that confirming this status of assistance dog may prove difficult although, in determining this, it is acceptable to ask the dog owner if the animal has been trained as an assistance dog, particularly if they are causing a nuisance.

It should be noted that whilst we understand that we have a responsibility towards any person who requires an assistance dog, this organisation must also consider the needs of other patients, visitors and staff.

A robust risk assessment has been raised at [Annex A](#_Annex_A_–) and this promotes compliance with Disability Discrimination Act legislation and is compliant with both infection prevention and control and the Health and Safety at Work Act requirements, understanding the needs of all patients and staff and both the legal and financial position of the partners.

# Annex A – Animals within a practice risk assessment

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Completed by: |  | Today’s date: |   |
| Date of previous risk assessment: |  | Date of next review:  |  |
| Categories of staff covered by this assessment: |  | Location of assistance dog: |  |
| Reasons for assistance dog’s attendance: |  | Period of assistance dog’s attendance: |  |
|  |  |  |  |

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Consequence** |  | **Likelihood score** |
| **1** | **2** | **3** | **4** | **5** |
| **Rare** | **Unlikely** | **Possible** | **Likely** | **Almost certain** |
| **5 Catastrophic** | 5 | 10 | 15 | 20 | 25 |
| **4 Major** | 4 | 8 | 12 | 16 | 20 |
| **3 Moderate** | 3 | 6 | 9 | 12 | 15 |
| **2 Minor** | 2 | 4 | 6 | 8 | 10 |
| **1 Negligible** | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| **Review, revise and provide information**When the risk assessment has identified significant risks, information must be provided to all those affected regarding the nature of the risk and the control measures to be implemented. |
| **Hazards** | **Group at risk** | **Controls** | **Likelihood** | **Consequence** | **Risk score** | **Mitigation/actions** |
| Hygiene | Employees and patients | Infection control measures | 3 | 3 | 9 | Clinical staff are to limit physical contact.Limit areas within the organisation where assistance dogs can go and where infection control may be compromised.Assistance dogs are well trained and this would include not going to the toilet in doorsClean any mess created by the dog. Should the owner not be able to do this, for example if they are visually impaired and are unaware that the dog has made a mess, then the staff member is to assist.PPE is required.Liaise with cleaning staff for a greater level of cleaning as required.Add others as appropriate including should the practice permit pets and visiting animals.Refer to the [Infection Prevention Control Policy](https://practiceindex.co.uk/gp/forum/resources/infection-prevention-control-policy-ipc.700/). |
| IPC | Employees  | Hand hygiene Measures | 3 | 3 | 9 | Clinical staff are to wash their hands prior to and after touching any animal.Non-clinical staff are to wash their hands after touching an animal. |
| Allergy | Patients and employees | Awareness | 2 | 5 | 10 | A sign is to be placed on or near the main entrance to suggest that only assistance dogs are permitted within the practice.Anaphylaxis training is to be given to all staff.Any staff member is to advise management should they have an allergy towards the animal that is being risk assessed.Hand hygiene awareness. |
| Training | Employees | Awareness | 2 | 2 | 4 | Seek advice from the dog owner or supporting charity as to expectation.Use the RCN document [Working with Dogs in Health Care Settings](https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&ved=2ahUKEwjd58Pkl9H9AhWEilwKHX18AV8QFnoECAoQAQ&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.rcn.org.uk%2F-%2Fmedia%2FRoyal-College-Of-Nursing%2FDocuments%2FPublications%2F2019%2FDecember%2F007-925.pdf&usg=AOvVaw0NFUf-Bk8uAVlC6SMDcx_p) as guidance.Follow advice and guidance within supporting policies.  |
| Financial | Partners | Legal and insurance | 3 | 4 | 12 | There are several types of domestic animal to be considered from a legal and insurance perspective:1. An assistance dog is likely to be covered within public liability insurance. Should there be an incident then, confirmation of assistance dog training would be needed from the owner
2. A therapy dog to support the wellbeing of patients, although it is unlikely to be required within a primary care setting. This is likely to be covered within the insurance, although confirmation is to be sought
3. A pet that is brought into the practice will not be insured and should the animal cause an injury, then any claim is to be sought against the owner. However, as a pet is ordinarily not permitted within a practice, permission has been given by [insert insurer]
4. A visiting animal that is not owned by the practice, for example a cat that visits, should not be allowed on the premises. As such it is unlikely that practice insurance will cover any damages incurred as a result of such animals being in the practice.

As for the above, in all instances advice from the insurer is to be sought with regard to any animal being allowed in the practice.Further to this, advice may be sought from [insert Defence Union] |
| Disabled staff members | Employees  | Evacuation planning | 2 | 5 | 10 | Any staff member who needs an assistance dog will require a detailed Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan (PEEP).This should be raised upon joining the practice or should the disability deteriorate.All staff are to be made aware, including fire evacuation training.Refer to the [Fire Safety Policy](https://practiceindex.co.uk/gp/forum/resources/fire-safety-policy.802/). Refer to the [Personal and General Emergency Evacuation Plan Policy](https://practiceindex.co.uk/gp/forum/resources/personal-and-general-emergency-evacuation-plan-policy.888/).  |
| Disabled service users  | Patients | Evacuation planning | 2 | 5 | 10 | Staff are to assist any patients in an emergency.Refer to the [Fire Safety Policy](https://practiceindex.co.uk/gp/forum/resources/fire-safety-policy.802/). Refer to the [Personal and General Emergency Evacuation Plan Policy](https://practiceindex.co.uk/gp/forum/resources/personal-and-general-emergency-evacuation-plan-policy.888/). |
| Phobia | Employees and patients | Managing the situation | 2 | 3 | 6 | Employees and patients who have a phobia to animals are, as far as reasonably practicable, to remove themselves from the situation.Any staff member is to advise management should they have a phobia towards any the animal being risk assessed.Management is to be made aware for additional mitigating measures to be adopted. |
| Aggressive animal | Employees and patients | Assistance dog training | 2 | 2 | 4 | Confirmation of training is difficult at the time as there is no UK register or need to have ID/proof of assistance dog status. Owner could become defensive should they be challenged resulting in a complaint or even legal challenge.Some charities will provide livery for the dog and ID for the owner.Having this training will ensure that the dog is well behaved and calm. These dogs are unlikely to bark or cause a nuisance. |
| Aggressive animal | Employees and patients | Awareness | 2 | 4 | 8 | It is unlikely that an assistance dog will become aggressive, a pet or visiting animal may become so as they are not trained to be in unfamiliar situations. Should a pet or visiting animal injure a person, then first aid measures are to be the immediate priority.Should the police be called, then the CQC must be advised.Litigation may be a consideration  |
|  |  | Add other risks and mitigations as appropriate |  |  |  |  |