

Renters' Rights Bill

Second Reading - Wednesday 9 October

Key Information

- The RSPCA welcomes the Renters' Rights Bill which will allow thousands of people who do not own their homes to have the chance to own pets and put an end to blanket bans on pets by landlords.
- Currently there is no regulation in this area. Decisions on whether pets are allowed in a rental property and, if so, how many and of which species are entirely at the landlords' discretion.
- The last Government committed to legislation, through the Renters' Reform Bill, to significantly improve this situation for both tenants and landlords. The RSPCA would urge the new Government to deliver this Bill as soon as possible.
- We hope the Bill will make it easier for people to keep their much loved pets if they move into rented accommodation reducing the strain on rehoming centres in England.
- However, the Renters' Rights Bill only applies to private rented properties and not social housing which risks creating an unfair, two tier system. This should be addressed when the Bill is brought forward.
- The RSPCA would also like to seek clarity from the UK Government on the circumstances in which landlords are able to "reasonably" refuse tenants with pets.

Background

- At present, there is no standard approach to whether landlords will allow pets in rented accommodation. In private rented and social housing sectors, it is left for individual landlords to decide on whether or not pets are allowed in their property.
- This has often resulted in blanket bans on pets in rented accommodation from landlords.
- This often means pet owners either have to rehome their much loved pets, choose to make themselves homeless rather than be separated from their pets, or just ignore the ban and bring their pet hoping the landlord does not enforce the tenancy agreement.
- In January 2022, the previous UK Government published its model tenancy agreement encouraging allowing pets to be the default position in England's rented sector - unless landlords have a justifiable reason for not allowing them to do so. This was welcome but was a voluntary rather than mandatory solution.
- The RSPCA very much welcomes the Renters' Rights Bill and are hopeful it will significantly improve the situation for tenants, their pets and landlords in England.

Animal Welfare and Housing

- As the UK's biggest animal welfare charity, the RSPCA sadly sees the results of the issues faced by tenants every day.
- We see it in animals that are given up to our centres by heartbroken families who have no choice but to do so if they want to find somewhere to live.
- We also see it in the animals staying in our care for longer than needed because blanket bans on pet ownership in rented accommodation have reduced the pool of potential forever families to take them home. We believe this should not be the case.
- Many housing authorities already have positive pet policies that both allow pets and promote responsible ownership, 15 housing associations received the RSPCA's PawPrints awards scheme in 2024.
- Animal abandonment is a huge problem for the RSPCA - we received 20,999 reports last year alone, more than in 2020, 2021 and 2022 and probably related to the cost of living.
- The RSPCA therefore urges the Government to tighten up on this issue given the increase in abandonments due to the cost of living crisis and the anecdotally reported increase in landlords not accepting American Bully XLs.

RSPCA's Position and Recommendations

- The RSPCA welcomes the Renters' Rights Bill which will allow thousands of people who do not own their homes to have the chance to own pets and put an end to blanket bans on pets by landlords.
- However, the Renters' Rights Bill only applies to private rented properties and not social housing which risks creating an unfair, two tier system. This should be addressed when the Bill is brought forward.
- The RSPCA would like to seek clarity from the UK Government on the circumstances in which landlords are able to "reasonably" refuse tenants with pets.
- We are supportive of new section 16C to the 1988 Act and Clause 11 of the Bill which states that landlords can require pet insurance to cover any damage to their property.
- We feel this is a balanced approach that protects both landlords and pet owners and is not an unreasonable request that should encourage responsible pet ownership.
- It would also ensure that fewer animals were needlessly given up because of housing issues, helping to lessen the burden on already overstretched charities.