

## PE1706/G

Petitioner submission of 6 August 2019

### **Response to the submission of the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Planning dated of 26<sup>th</sup> July 2019**

Thank you for the opportunity to submit a response to PE1706/F.

It is encouraging to see that the Scottish Government is taking action on the important issue of homelessness and pets by funding a report by the Simon Community that will make practical recommendations to support housing providers to accommodate people with their pets. I look forward to reading their report in due course.

However, I do not feel that the response adequately deals with the issue of 'no pet' covenants used extensively in the private sector. I do not think that leaving the question of pets to individual landlords is fair. The relationship owners have with their pets is often similar to a family member or close friend and provides valuable social support, and it is unfair to leave such an important issue solely to landlords who naturally focus on the investment interests of their property. Your response says that you ask landlords to consider "*the range of benefits, including reduced social isolation and loneliness that can come from pet ownership*" but the majority of landlords will prioritise their own interests over those of their tenant. Therefore, even if a tenant has a very close relationship with their dog/cat and it provides valuable social support, the landlord can insist on a 'no pet' covenant and require the tenant to relinquish their pet. This is the case even where the pet causes no harm or damage to the landlord's property nor any nuisance to neighbours. A well-behaved dog/cat can be excluded from the rental property and will need to be rehomed even if this causes significant harm to the tenant's mental health. This is why the Government needs to govern the use of 'no pet' covenants in the private sector using legislation, as some other countries have done, to ensure that there is a fair balance between the property interests of private landlords and the social interests of tenants who enjoy emotional and physical benefits from living with their pets. Tenants should be allowed to live with well-behaved pets and landlords should be allowed to exclude problem pets which damage property or cause a nuisance to other tenants.

I think that the Government need to take a number of considerations into account when considering its response to the use of 'no pet' covenants in the private sector including:

1. **The change in the housing landscape:** Due to housing shortages and austerity measures more people now rent privately for long term. Private rentals in the UK doubled in 12 years from 2000 to 2012 and are continuing to rise<sup>1</sup>. Some people will live all their life in private rental housing. Given the extensive use of 'no pet' covenants in the private sector, these people will be denied the benefits that come from living with pets.
2. **Health benefits of living with pets: There is now an extensive body of research demonstrating the physical, psychological, therapeutic and social health**

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<sup>1</sup> Beckett *Trends in the UK Housing Market* (2014) Office of National Statistics.

**benefits of the human-companion animal bond.** Examples are given in my previous response.

3. **The economic benefits to society:** In the UK it has been estimated that *pet ownership saves the NHS £2.45 billion a year* due to the reduced number of visits to the doctor by people with pets<sup>2</sup>. The pet industry is big business and brings significant benefits to the economy. The wide use of 'no pet' covenants in the private sector is preventing the expansion of the pet industry and the benefits that come from this.

### **The need for legislation to govern the use of 'no pet' covenants**

I suggest that legislation is needed for the following reasons:

- (i) To redress the imbalance of power between private landlords and tenants that has been caused by the housing shortages. Without legislation, the personal autonomy of the landlord is prioritised over all other interests (including the public interest in pet ownership). This means that the property interests of private landlords prevail over all other considerations including the health benefits of tenants. This is unfair on tenants.
- (ii) To ensure those in the private sector are not disadvantaged over those in the public sector. The submission PE1706/C by the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations stated that the majority of Housing Associations in Scotland have positive pet policies. Shelter Scotland's submission (PE1706/A) states "*It is not fair that those in the private rented sector are denied the right to have a pet*". Yet the wide use of 'no pet' covenants in the private sector does prevent many tenants from living with pets. This means that without legislation a two-tier system will exist, allowing those in the public sector to live with pets (and enjoy the health benefits of pet ownership) while many of those in the private sector will be denied this opportunity. We need legislation to redress this inequality.

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<sup>2</sup> Hall et al, *Companion Animal Economics: the economic impact of companion animals in the UK* (CABI publishers, 2016).