

PE1706/F

Minister for Local Government, Housing and Planning submission of 26 July 2019

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the above petition and the discussions that took place at Scottish Parliament's Public Petitions Committee on 30 May 2019.

In the Scottish Government response from 21 November 2018, we highlighted that decisions around keeping pets are ultimately for individual landlords and will need to balance a variety of potentially competing factors. However, we would encourage all landlords to take a practical and considered approach to this issue and to consider the range of benefits, including reduced social isolation and loneliness that can come from pet ownership.

In the case of emergency or temporary accommodation and the intersection with Article 8 of the ECHR, it is particularly important to have regard to the specific circumstances of each individual case and to ensure that policies are applied in a manner which is proportionate and reasonable. Having an adequate supply of accommodation which meets a wide range of needs is the best way for Scotland to address this and other housing challenges.

Supporting people to maintain the relationships with their pets contributes to the Scottish Government's intention to adopt a person-centred approach to homelessness services, and demonstrates our commitment to listening to people's lived experiences as we move forward with the implementation of our Ending Homelessness Together Action Plan.

The Action Plan was published in November 2018 and responds to the recommendations made by the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group (HARSAG) which was established by the First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon MSP to identify the actions needed to working towards ending homelessness.

National and local partnerships are key to leading sustained and effective change. That means we need to work across and outside traditional boundaries and continue to develop collaborative approaches. We are clear that this collaboration is important to deliver progress towards ending homelessness.

Issues relating to access to housing for homeless people who have pets were raised during the HARSAG considerations. As a result, the Scottish Government funded the Simon Community to undertake some analysis of current practice around how services can support people experiencing homelessness who have a pet. They are currently compiling a best practice report which will address the benefits of the relationship with a pet for some people and explain how disrupting that relationship can cause real trauma for people at a time when they are already suffering the trauma of homelessness. The report will make practical recommendations to support housing providers to accommodate people experiencing homelessness who have a pet.

The guidance will include case studies, a best practice approach to supporting homeless people and their pets, as well as information on existing services and support available to people with pets. Many services across Scotland already have good practice in place, but in a significant number of local authority areas there is minimal provision. I expect the report to be published before the end of the summer.

The Scottish Government is committed to working with local authorities and third sector providers to deliver services in their areas which treat all service users with dignity and respect, which includes acknowledging the importance of people's relationships with their animals.

I hope that the petitioner finds this information helpful.