Assistance Dogs Policy

Tower Hamlets Customer Services

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# 1. Introduction

* 1. The council recognises that promoting human rights, equality and diversity while tackling inequality, discrimination and harassment are central to the achievement of our vision. Therefore, it is important to ensure all customers are able to access our services and have a positive experience in our face-to-face settings, including handlers of assistance dogs.
  2. Assistance dogs are not pets or companion dogs. They are specially trained working dogs that support a person with a disability (their handler) in various ways to support their independence, for example, providing the handler with a medical alert or guiding the handler to specific locations.
  3. Assistance dogs are generally with their handlers 24 hours a day and are welcome in our customer service areas.
  4. It is a legal requirement to remove barriers to enable the handler to have an equal and positive experience when accessing our customer services.
  5. This policy aims to support colleagues in the delivery of open and accessible services for our customers who have assistance dogs. The principles apply to all colleagues but will have particular relevance to those working in frontline customer service roles – for example, in our Residents’ Hubs.

## Definitions

* 1. The following terminology is used in this policy:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Assistance dogs | Working dogs that are individually trained to perform tasks or do work for the benefit of a person with a disability.  Assistance dogs help their handlers in a variety of ways, e.g. providing the handler with a medical alert or guiding the handler to locations.  Assistance dogs are not pets or companion dogs. |
| Assistance dog handler | A person with a disability who uses and benefits from having an assistance dog. |
| Charity-owned assistance dog | An assistance dog which belongs to, and is trained by, a charity. |
| Owner-trained assistance dog | An assistance dog which is owned and trained by their handler. |

# 2. Who to contact if you need help

* 1. Should a council officer require help with the application of this policy, please contact your line manager in the first instance.

# 3. Guiding principles

* 1. Most assistance dogs belong to a charity that is responsible for their training and welfare. Assistance Dogs UK (ADUK) is the largest voluntary coalition of assistance dog charities that have been accredited by Assistance Dogs International (ADI) and/or the International Guide Dog Federation (IGDF).
  2. It should be noted that some assistance dogs may be owner-trained. Dogs trained in this way are valid assistance dogs. Handlers are expected to take full responsibility for dogs trained in this way.
  3. Both owner-trained and charity-owned assistance dogs are welcome on and in council premises.

## Recognising an Assistance Dog on entry to council premises

* 1. Most assistance dogs are instantly recognisable by their harness, jacket or bandana (see Appendix 1). However, the law does not require the dog to wear a harness or coat to identify it as an Assistance Dog (EHRC 2017).
  2. Owner-trained dogs may not have coats, harnesses, jackets or bandanas.
  3. Assistance dogs can be trained to support people of all ages, therefore colleagues should note that a child or young person may have an assistance dog.
  4. Assistance dogs trained by member organisations of ADUK will have at least one of the following forms of identification:
* ID tags on the dog’s collar
* Harness
* Organisation-specific branded dog jacket or harness
* Lead slip



* 1. Assistance dogs belonging to an ADUK member organisation will also have a yellow ADUK branded Identification Booklet. However, handlers may not have this to hand at the time of their visit. The booklet contains:
* Information about the owner and their dog
* Details of the training organisation
* Details of the dog’s owner

## Qualities and behaviours of an Assistance Dog

* 1. ADUK stipulate that assistance dogs are:
* Highly-trained
* Trained to toilet before leaving home and on command, so unlikely to foul in public areas
* Vaccinated in line with best practice guidelines and have comprehensive routing parasite prevention to protect against fleas, worms and other transferable organisms
* Regularly checked by experienced veterinarians
* Covered by specific assistance dog insurance for public liability cover
* Accompanied by a disabled handler who has been trained to work alongside their assistance dog
* Recognisable by a harness, organisation-specific coat, ID tag on their collar or lead slip they wear
* Sit or lie quietly on the floor next to their handler
  1. ADUK stipulate that assistance dogs will not:
* Wander freely around the premises
* Display reactive behaviours towards humans or other animals such as growling, snarling, lunging or biting
* Show continuous signs of fear such as crouched body, tail tucked under, ears flat back, jumping up or constant soliciting of attention from members of the public

## How Assistance Dogs make a difference to their handlers

* 1. An assistance dog can be trained to do many tasks which their handlers may find difficult or impossible otherwise, for example:
* Provide medical alerts
* Guide the handler to locations
* Open and close doors
* Pick up objects
* Assist with dressing and undressing
* Accompany their handler whilst shopping, etc.
* Act as a physical support
* Raise the alarm
* Operate control buttons
* Switch lights on and off
* Carry items
* Load and unload the washing machine
* Fetch the telephone and other items
* Provide the handler with confidence by finding a safe space for the handler or offering grounding by just ‘being there’, such as the dogs supplied by Autism Dogs or Veterans with Dogs.
  1. The above is not an exhaustive list due to the individual needs of each handler.

# 4. Process and behaviour expectations

* 1. Employees should ask and learn how an assistance dog supports their handler.
  2. Steps should be taken to better understand the handler’s individual needs and the role the assistance dog plays in meeting those needs.
  3. For planned visits, where an assistance dog is not able to be present for any reason, it is important to note how the individual needs of the handler will be supported.
  4. Any records relating to the assistance dog and their handler, including next of kin, must be kept up-to-date.
  5. Assistance dogs should not be separated from their handlers unless absolutely necessary to avoid distress and reduce the risk of the animals being stolen on council property. These animals are of high value to their handler and the charity they may belong to.

## Objections to the presence of Assistance Dogs

* 1. Few justifiable grounds exist for excluding assistance dogs from general settings such as council premises.
  2. Objections under religious belief are not considered reasonable.
  3. Allergy to dogs alone is not reason enough to refuse an assistance dog entry to council buildings, as per the European Human Rights Convention. All reasonable steps should be taken to minimise an allergic person’s exposure to an assistance dog.
  4. The council understands that there may be circumstances where some customers may be fearful or uncomfortable with an assistance dog being present. Employees should seek to reassure the individual that in accordance with this policy the animal present is a specially trained working dog and take steps to minimise that individual’s exposure to the assistance dog where possible. Employees should seek support from their line manager if required.

## Pet dogs

* 1. Pet dogs are different to assistance dogs.
  2. Pet dogs should not be permitted in council buildings except under exceptional circumstances.

# 5. Roles and responsibilities

## Employee responsibilities

* 1. All employees should have a clear understanding of this Assistance Dog policy.
  2. For pre-arranged appointments, colleagues should discuss with handlers their needs and agree any arrangements in advance.
  3. Where relevant, colleagues should document the details and outcomes of any discussions had with handlers or next of kin.
  4. Colleagues should not seek to engage with assistance dogs. This includes petting. Best practice around assistance dogs is to ignore them.
  5. Managers are responsible for the local implementation of this policy and for ensuring remedial action is taken where employees fail to comply with it.

## Responsibilities of Assistance Dog handlers

* 1. At all times the care and assistance required by the assistance dog is the responsibility of the handler.
  2. Dogs must be kept on a short lead at all times.
  3. The handler should ensure the dog is fit and well and its care regime follows guidance provided by the relevant ADUK member organisation.
  4. Assistance dogs should be given the opportunity to toilet before entering the building.
  5. All assistance dogs are brought into the building at the handler’s risk and the council cannot be held responsible or liable for the health and safety of the dog or any damage as a result of the visit.

# Appendix 1: Identifying Assistance Dogs

The table below outlines some of the coats and harnesses you may see. Please note this list is not exhaustive and some designs may change over time.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Description** | **Recognition** |
| **Autism Dogs**  Company logo of 'Autism Dogs Community Interest Company' logo of 'Dogs for Autism' | Autism assistance dogs for children.  Autism assistance dogs for adults.  Therapy dogs for schools, colleges, universities and hospitals. | Usually wear a blue coat.  An assistance dog wearing a blue coat. |
| **Autism/Asperger’s Dogs** | These dogs are trained to assist individuals with autism and Asperger’s.  For example, act as a constant companion for children with autism to help them improve social interactions and relationships, expand verbal and nonverbal communication, teach life skills, and increase interest in activities and decrease stress within the family. | Usually wear a blue coat.  An assistance dog wearing a blue coat. |
| **Canine Partners**  A logo for the charity 'Canine Partners' | Assistance dogs for adults with physical disabilities. | Usually wear a purple coat with the Canine Partners logo.  Picture of a purple dog jacket with the 'Canine Partners' logo on it |
| **Dog A.I.D. (Assistance in Disability)**  Logo of Dog A.I.D. | Empower adults with physical/mobility-based disabilities to train their own pet dog as an assistance dog. | Usually wear a red and yellow coat displaying their logo Dog A.I.D.  Picture of dog wearing a red and yellow jacket with Dog A.I.D. logo |
| **Dogs For Good**  Logo of 'Dogs for Good' | Assistance dogs for families with an autistic child.  Assistance dogs for physically disabled children and adults.  Family dogs – providing advice and support for families with an autistic child with a pet dog.  Community dogs (providing animal assisted therapy) | Picture of a dog wearing a green coat bearing the 'Dogs for Good' logo  Usually wear a green coat with logo Dogs for Good |
| **Guide Dogs**  Logo for the 'Guide Dogs' organisation | Assist people who are blind or visually impaired. | Guide dogs wear a white harness with a fluorescent strip on the front chest panel.  If the handler is both visually and hearing impaired the fluorescent panel at the front will be replaced by a red/white check panel.  Picture of a dog wearing a white harness with a fluorescent chest panel |
| **Guide Dogs for Epilepsy** | Assist people who have epilepsy/seizures. | Usually wear a blue and white checked coat.  Picture of a dog wearing a blue and white coat |
| **Deaf/blind Guide Dogs** | Assist people who are deaf and blind. | Wear a red and white harness.  Picture of a dog wearing a red and white harness |
| **Hearing Dogs for Deaf people**  Logo of the 'Hearing Dogs for Deaf People' organisation | Assist people who are deaf or hearing impaired. | Wear a burgundy coat with ‘Hearing Dog’ written on the coat.  Picture of a dog wearing a burgundy coat bearing the text 'hearing dog' |
| **Seeing Dog Alliance**  Logo for the organisation 'The Seeing Dogs Alliance' | Trained dogs to guide blind and partially sighted adults. | Usually wear a green and yellow coat with logo The Seeing Dog Alliance.  Picture of a dog wearing a green and yellow coat bearing the 'Seeing Dogs Alliance' logo. |
| **Support Dogs**  Logo for the charity 'Support Dogs'. | A support dog can be trained to do many other tasks which their owner may find difficult or impossible. For example: opening/closing doors, calling an ambulance, picking up/carrying objects, assisting with dressing and undressing, alerting people when their handler has had a seizure. | Usually wear a blue and white checked coat.  Picture of a dog wearing a blue and white coat. |
| **Medical Detection Dogs**  Logo for the organisation 'Medical Detection Dogs' | A medical alert dog is trained to assist individuals who manage complex health conditions.  They are taught to detect the odour changes that are associated with life-threatening medical events. For example, diabetic alert dogs are trained to smell the chemical body changes that occur as the insulin levels increase or drop.  When an individual is experiencing a blood sugar high or low, their body is releasing chemicals that change their typical scent. | Usually wear a red coat.  Picture of a dog wearing a read coat |

# Appendix 2: Useful contact information

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Assistance Dogs Northern Ireland** | Provide assistance dogs for adults and children with Autism. | Telephone:  07557 960 599  Email:  [info@adni.org.uk](mailto:info@adni.org.uk)  Website:  [www.adni.org.uk](http://www.adni.org.uk) |
| **Autism Dog is a Community Interest Company (non-profit company)** | Autism Dogs CIC offers the following assistance dogs services:   * Autism assistance dog for children * Autism assistance dog for adults * Therapy dogs for schools, colleges, universities and hospitals | Telephone:  01260 278 416  Email:  [info@autismdogs.co.uk](mailto:info@autismdogs.co.uk) |
| **Bravehound** | Provide assistance dogs for military veterans with a diagnosed mental health condition including Post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety and depression. | Telephone:  01417 398 940  Email: [hello@bravehound.co.uk](mailto:hello@bravehound.co.uk)  Website:  [www.bravehound.co.uk](http://www.bravehound.co.uk) |
| **Canine Partners** | Canine Partners is a registered charity and offers the following Assistance Dog services:   * Assistance Dogs for adults with physical disabilities. | Telephone:  03456 580 480  Email:  [info@caninepartners.org.uk](mailto:info@caninepartners.org.uk)  Website:  [www.caninepartners.org.uk](http://www.caninepartners.org.uk) |
| **Dog A.I.D. (Assistance in disability)** | Dog A.I.D. is a registered charity and empowers adults with physical/mobility-based disabilities to train their own pet dog as an assistance dog. | Telephone:  01743 588 469  Email:  [admin@dogaid.org.uk](mailto:admin@dogaid.org.uk)  Website:  [www.dogaid.org.uk](http://www.dogaid.org.uk) |
| **Dogs for Autism** | Assistance dogs for people with a diagnosis of Autism. | Telephone:  0774 5574 332  Email:  [darwindogs2020@gmail.com](mailto:darwindogs2020@gmail.com)  Website:  [www.darwindogs.org.uk](http://www.darwindogs.org.uk) |
| **Dogs for Good** | Dogs for Good is a registered charity and offers the following assistance dog services:   * Assistance Dogs for families with an autistic child. * Assistance Dogs for physically disabled children and adults. * Family dogs – providing advice and support for families with an autistic child with a pet dog. * Community dogs (providing animal assisted therapy). | Telephone:  01295 252 600  Email:  [info@dogsforgood.org](mailto:info@dogsforgood.org)  Website:  [www.dogsforgood.org](http://www.dogsforgood.org) |
| **Guide Dogs** | Guide Dogs is a registered charity and offers the following services   * Guide dogs for adults who are blind or partially sighted. * Guide dogs for young people who are blind or partially sighted. | Telephone:  0870 600 2323  Email:  [guidedogs@guidedogs.org.uk](mailto:guidedogs@guidedogs.org.uk)  Website:  [www.guidedogs.org.uk](http://www.guidedogs.org.uk) |
| **Hearing Dogs for Deaf People** | Hearing Dogs for Deaf People is a registered charity.  Dogs are trained by this charity to alert their deaf handler to sounds they would otherwise miss, such as the smoke alarm, alarm clock, and a baby’s cry. These dogs also provide emotional support to their handlers. | Telephone:  01844 348 100  Email:  [info@hearingdogs.org.uk](mailto:info@hearingdogs.org.uk)  Website:  [www.hearingdogs.org.uk](http://www.hearingdogs.org.uk) |
| **Hypohounds** | Diabetic alert dogs predominantly for children with Type 1 diabetes. | Telephone:  01233 756 555  Email:  [info@hypohounds.co.uk](mailto:info@hypohounds.co.uk)  Website:  [www.hypohounds.co.uk](http://www.hypohounds.co.uk) |
| **Oliver’s Army** | Provide assistance dog training for handlers with dogs; they work with most disabilities including PTSD, anxiety and depression. | Telephone:  01592 869 489  Email:  management@oliversarmy  assistancedogs.org.uk  Website:  [www.oliversarmyassistance](http://www.oliversarmyassistance)  dogs.com |
| **Support Dogs** | Support Dogs is a registered charity. They aim to improve the lives of children and adults with various challenging medical conditions. They specialise in training:   * Autism assistance dogs for children with autism * Seizure alert dogs for people with epilepsy * Disability Assistance Dogs for people with physical disabilities | Telephone:  0114 261 7800  Website:  [www.supportdogs.org.uk](http://www.supportdogs.org.uk) |
| **Veterans with dogs** | Assistance dogs for ex-Service and military personnel with a diagnosed mental health condition. | Telephone:  01626 798 030  Email:  [info@veteranswithdogs.org.uk](mailto:info@veteranswithdogs.org.uk)  Website:  [www.veteranswithdogs.uk](http://www.veteranswithdogs.uk) |

# Appendix 3: General tips for good practice

An assistance dog is a working dog and as such should be treated with respect. Do not approach or speak to the dog without first checking with the handler.

1. Approaching a handler and their assistance dog

* If an assistance dog harness handle is down, this means the handler may like your help or that the dog is “off duty”. If the person has requested your assistance, you should approach the person from the opposite side to where the assistance dog is.
* Do not take the harness handle or the lead as these are what the handler uses to control the dog.
* When calling a customer for their appointment, employees are required to fully consider that person’s circumstances. For example, someone with an assistance dog may not hear their name called or see where the member of staff who has called them has gone. Please take such factors into consideration and make reasonable adjustments.
* When being guided, some people like to walk by your side, others may request that you walk in front of the dog, and they will follow. Always ask the person’s preference.
* Remember to offer clear directions when guiding a disabled person who has requested your assistance.
* If the person is deafblind, approach face on and try to speak to them first; if there is no response, gently tap the person on the shoulder and arm, try speech again. If the person uses a deafblind manual a hand may be raised by the person to indicate you should use the deafblind manual or the block alphabet. If colleagues are unaware of how to use the deafblind manual, the block alphabet can be easily used by tracing each letter onto the palm of the deafblind person’s hand.

1. Care of assistance dog on separation from handler

* It is important to remember the assistance dog may show signs of distress if they have to be separated from their handler.
* The assistance dog should be kept as near to the handler as possible and any separation from its handler should be for as short a time as possible. Separation should only happen in an emergency until contact has been made with an assistance dog organisation.
* The dog’s general welfare should be looked after – for example, it should not be placed in direct sunlight or too near electrical plugs. The dog should be offered a bowl of water; feeding arrangements will be carried out by the appropriate assistance dog organisation.
* Assistance dogs are usually toileted by their handlers prior to leaving home and again prior to entering buildings.