



Statement from The Society for Companion Animal Studies in response to learning that some landlords, including social landlords are considering requiring tenants to relinquish XL bully dogs.

The Society for Companion Animal Studies (SCAS) advises that it would be highly irresponsible and deeply inequitable for landlords to require tenants with XL bully dogs to relinquish their dogs or face eviction from their home. The legislation states that it is illegal to rehome or transfer ownership of an XL Bully dog after 31 January 2024. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/ban-on-xl-bully-dogs>. This means that if landlords require tenants to relinquish their XL Bullies, the dogs must be euthanised.

Most XL Bully dog owners are responsible and will obtain a Certificate of Exemption and comply with the newly introduced law. Complying with the requirement to keep the dogs muzzled and on the lead in public places means there is no risk to others and hence no reason to exclude the dog. Eviction of tenants should only be necessary in the case of those who fail to comply with the new law.

Forcing people to have their dogs euthanised will have egregious and far-reaching consequences. The death of a dog in these circumstances will cause deep grieving without closure. It will be a driver for homelessness, and enduring street homelessness as currently many homeless shelters in the UK do not admit people with pets. This impossible choice may also lead to some being lost to suicide. Another potential is for the development, in those impacted, of negative views towards those whose actions result in the death of dogs, and possibly resentment towards other neighbours whose dogs are not caught up in this legislation.

SCAS strongly encourages landlords to have written **pet policies** that encompass the steps that owners should take to help ensure that their animals are kept responsibly and not allowed to cause nuisance. The **Pet Owner Committee concept** is an excellent approach for landlords who manage a number of tenancies in a complex or on housing estates. A committee to include pet and non-pet owning residents, a veterinarian and possibly an animal behaviourist and/or an experienced animal welfare worker, devises a set of rules for responsible animal care tailored to the community. The rules can then be subject to approval by the landlord or housing association and will be subject to review. New tenants would be oriented to the pet keeping rules. Complaints are directed to the committee, and only referred to management if these cannot be resolved. Such an approach is found to be effective, engenders good feelings and reduces oversight from management.

For most people, dogs are family members, and their companionship brings inestimable benefits. Although dogs have been domesticated for many millennia, perhaps over 100,000 years ago, it is only in the last 50 years that human-dog relationships have been subjected to serious scientific research. The findings to date are profound and startling. Our canine relationships can be truly symbiotic and life enhancing. Yet, these findings are not generally known and public knowledge and practice pertaining to human-animal interactions lags behind the research.

Through evidence-based research by colleagues in many professions, including health, education, and social care, we now know that the companionship of dogs can enhance human health and well-

being across lifespan. Dogs also contribute greatly to neighbourhoods and society. Please find attached an appendix with some examples of research findings, with references.

Appendix

A few brief examples of the health and social benefits from dog ownership:

Interactions with companion animals can benefit child development by **reducing stress and anxiety, improving social interactions, and by enhancing motivation, engagement and learning**¹. Children living with dogs are **more physically active**², they seek out their pets when they are upset³, often ranking pets higher than some human relationships within their social network⁴. **Teenagers bonded to dogs are less likely to 'go off the rails'**⁵ – they are less likely to be drawn into gang culture or come to the attention of the police; are less likely to take excess alcohol or get involved with drugs; they do better academically and have more traditional values. Again, these effects will help stabilise neighbourhoods.

People with dogs tend to have **better general health** and make fewer GP appointments⁶. **Dog owners take more exercise** and are **more likely to meet guidelines for physical activity**² which is linked with increased fitness, greater ease of performance of everyday activities, improved mood and quality of life, increased body leanness, healthier weight and 15% reduction in risk of early death⁷. Dog walking in older adults was associated with lower BMI and fewer limitations in activities of daily living⁸.

Evidence also shows that dogs provide their families with **high levels of social support** e.g. following adverse life events including bereavement and their companionship mitigates against loneliness and depression⁹. This latter effect is of particular importance for those suffering mental ill health and for older people living alone.

People and companion animals can bring each other mutual support as they both age¹⁰. Older, homebound pet owners have been shown to be better at paying attention, remembering details, and learning from past experiences than those who don't own pets¹¹.

There are significant **cardioprotective effects**. Large scale studies have determined that dog owners living alone have a lower risk of death after heart attack (33%) and stroke (27%)¹². These cardioprotective effects are now thought to be due to the elevated levels of the neurotransmitter oxytocin¹³, detected when people are in the presence of dogs¹⁴. Oxytocin has recently been identified as a key regulator of the cardiovascular system.

The **social capital effect**: dogs have been identified as strong creators of social capital – the development of safer, friendlier neighbourhoods¹⁵. Dogs act as social lubricants – providing interesting and non-threatening opportunities for people, including strangers, to strike up conversations. Oxytocin is also known as the bonding hormone – facilitating the development of trust and better communication.

It can be seen therefore, that the presence of well cared for dogs in a community serves to modify human behaviours, encouraging better relationships and the creation of safer neighbourhoods. This has been recognised by the World Health Organisation.

“Companion animals that are properly cared for bring immense benefits to their owners and to society and are a danger to no one” (WHO, 1981)“.

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