

Pet Think Tank

Report 2018



At SpareRoom we
believe home is the
most important thing
in our lives.

If we're not happy at
home, we're not
happy full stop.

Foreword

But home isn't just where you were born, or somewhere unlocked by a mortgage. Home isn't about things, or even a place. Home is more special than that. Whether they're family, friends or a bunch of flatmates you met online, the people you share your space with are what makes it home. They're there to celebrate the good days and help you through the bad. A friendly face when you walk through the door goes a long way.

And that doesn't have to mean just people. Sharing our homes with animals can also have a huge positive impact on our quality of life and emotional well-being. Indeed, as you'll discover later in this report, 97% of pet owners we surveyed told us they consider their pet part of their family.

Yet finding a place to live when you have a pet can be incredibly difficult, especially if you rent. But why? What are the reasons landlords prefer not to let to tenants with pets? More importantly, what can we do to change that? We can't force anyone to want pets in their property, and there are legitimate reasons why landlords might not, so we wanted to find out what's driving the issue, from both sides, and find some solutions so we can start a conversation and make a change for the better.

A handwritten signature in white ink that reads "Matt Hutchinson". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

Matt Hutchinson, Communications Director at SpareRoom



**97% of pet
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Introduction

SpareRoom is committed to ensuring that renters have a good quality of life, and anyone living in rented accommodation - whether alone or in a flatshare – is able to feel at home.

Although the benefits of living with pets are widely understood and documented, not all landlords see pets as a positive, which often makes it incredibly hard to find pet-friendly rentals in the UK.

Introduction

To encourage landlords to think differently about pets, SpareRoom has launched the UK's first 'Political Think Tank Run by Pets and Their People', as well as commissioning research on the subject from landlords and renters (both pet owners and non-pet owners).

The Think Tank brought together a mix of experts from across the housing and animal welfare sectors, including charities, vets, landlords, property experts, pet owners and even pets themselves, to discuss a range of topics, from landlords not allowing pets in their properties, to the repercussions this has on renters.

The Think Tank reviewed the issues around pets and renting and discussed how people's lives are affected by pet ownership, as well as the costs and issues that both pet owners and landlords face when pets and properties mix. Members used this opportunity to work together to propose recommendations and solutions to the issues raised.

The Think Tank



The Think Tank Run By Pets and Their People included:

Kate Faulkner - Property Expert



Kate is one of the UK's leading property experts and is passionate that most of the problems in the residential area can be solved if the media, industry and government work together to educate consumers. Kate has set up a free consumer site www.propertychecklists.co.uk and works with groups for home-buying and selling along with The Lettings Industry Council. Kate regularly features on BBC TV and radio including You and Yours, Moneybox and 5Live's Midnight Property Expert as well as LBC's Property Hour and on ITV's This Morning.

Dr Bob - Vet



Dr Robert White-Adams MRCVS is a veterinary surgeon and veterinary media consultant. After qualifying from Bristol University in 2000 he spent several years working in a variety of veterinary practices covering companion-animals, farm animals, horses and wildlife. In 2008 he opened his own small animal practice in his home town of Weston-super-Mare which he now runs alongside his media consultancy work.



Rachel Williams - RSPCA

Rachel is Senior Parliamentary Advisor for the RSPCA, the world's oldest animal welfare charity. Rachel's role includes work around housing and pets in both the social and private rented sector, ensuring that housing providers are working to protect the welfare of their animal residents and encouraging responsible animal ownership amongst their human residents.



Rosie Downes - Crisis

Rosie is a campaign manager for homeless charity Crisis and was keen to join the discussion to talk about pets and homelessness. Crisis' concern is specifically around people being at risk of homelessness; for example, if a landlord refused to allow a dog it might stop someone from taking an offer of housing and the person could end up homeless as a result.



Andrew Bucher - Chief Veterinary Officer

Andrew is Chief Veterinary Officer for Paws.com. Paws is dedicated to helping less fortunate pets by supporting shelters, plus encouraging and educating pet owners in new and engaging ways. Andrew is involved in the Think Tank as he wants to make renting for pet owners easier, by helping to educate landlords and pet owners as part of the conversation.



Rosanna Spero - Financial Journalist

Rosanna has been a financial journalist for 29 years working on a range of publications and for 12 years, the Money Mail, Enterprise Money Mail and Property Mail (as property editor) sections of the Daily Mail. She left the paper in September 2006 to pursue a freelance career. She writes on areas from finance, to pregnancy, motoring and pet ownership. Rosanna has contributed to the Think Tank around the financial impact renting with a pet has for landlords, tenants and charities.



Matt Huchinson - Communications Director, SpareRoom

Matt has been SpareRoom's media spokesperson since 2007 and regularly provides comment and opinion on renting, sharing and housing for the UK and US media. Matt is chairperson for the Think Tank.

This report looks into the state of the nation's renters when it comes to pets and landlords, covering the current landscape around pets and renting, the benefits of renting with pets for both tenants and landlords, and the downsides of renting to pet owners, before suggesting possible solutions for SpareRoom to drive and help implement.

The Current Landscape Around Pets and Renting



Current landscape around pets and renting

We are a nation of pet lovers

Britain is a nation of pet lovers, with more than half of households now owning an animal, 10.3 million homes currently owning a cat, and 9.3 million owning a dog¹.

The benefits of responsible pet ownership to both human and animal welfare are now widely recognised. Pets can provide company and companionship, increase physical well-being and improve mental health. And with animal charities always full to the brim with all kinds of animals looking for their forever home, giving as many people as possible the opportunity to have a pet is clearly in their interests as well.

¹ 1-1 PDSA PAWS Report 2017help implement.



Current landscape around pets and renting

Renters are struggling to find pet-friendly accommodation

Despite the popularity of pets among Brits, figures from SpareRoom reveal that only 7% of ads in the UK on SpareRoom would 'consider' pets, with this dropping to just 5% - that's one in 20 homes - in the London area².

78% of pet owners surveyed say they struggled to find pet-friendly rentals, although 21% of pet owners admitted to having pets in their rented accommodation anyway, keeping their pets a secret from their landlords³.

² Number of live ads on SpareRoom in Q2, 2018

³ One Poll and SpareRoom's survey of 3,193 pet owners, October 2018

Current landscape around pets and renting

Jason Ashley, owner of canine celebrity and Instagram star Ramsey the Blue Staffy (228K followers on Instagram), has experienced concerns from landlords related to living with his dog. He viewed at least 30 properties in the Surrey area that he wasn't able to live in because of his pet, before finally settling with a basic rental ahead of him moving out and buying a property.

Jason admits to lying to landlords about the breed of his dog to give him a better chance of finding somewhere to live, after some landlords refused him due to the breed. He discovered landlords are more inclined to rent to 'small terriers' over the 'Staffordshire bull terrier' breed of his own dog, Ramsey. When asked whether he would consider letting someone else look after his pet if it meant him finding otherwise suitable accommodation, Jason responded by saying, "Not a chance. That would never cross my mind".

On the other side of this there are many who want to own a pet but aren't able to. Research reveals that 82% of people who don't currently own a pet would either like to or may like to. The reason over half this group (55%) don't own a pet is because their rental agreement won't allow it⁴.

⁴ SpareRoom's survey of 3,483 non pet owners, October 2018

Current landscape around pets and renting

Why landlords are apprehensive about renting to pet owners

Of the 1,261 landlords surveyed, a whopping 69% said they don't allow pets in their properties. When asked which animals they'd be happiest with, fish topped the list (68%), with cats coming in second (32%) dogs in third place (24%) and spiders at the bottom of the list (15%)⁵. The top reasons for landlords not allowing pets into their homes were:

1. They're worried the pets will smell (57%)⁶
2. They're worried about damage to their property caused by pets (55%)⁷
3. They're worried that the pets aren't trained (37%)⁸
4. They're worried about noise complaints (36%)⁹
5. They feel their property isn't suitable (33%)¹⁰

Current landscape around pets and renting

“I think landlords are quite cautious people. They’re always worried about money and one of their biggest fears is damage by tenants. If you’ve got 10 people chasing to rent your property, why would you risk taking someone with a pet? Landlords want a tenant to be in their property for as long as possible, with as little fuss as possible and they want their rent each month, they don’t want anything to compromise this or any pet related damage to eat into their profit.”

– Kate Faulkner, Property Expert.

And it’s not just damage to the property that the landlord is responsible for, but the impact that having pets has on neighbours too. Over a third of landlords surveyed said they’re worried about noise complaints from neighbours (36%) if they let to tenants with pets.

Current landscape around pets and renting

The link between pets and homelessness

For some people, the lack of pet-friendly accommodation can be even more devastating, with many incidences reported where people have become or remain homeless because they don't want to give up their pet.

Rosie Downes, Campaigns Manager at homeless charity Crisis said:

“From Crisis’ perspective we believe that no-one should ever have to face homelessness. But if it does happen then people shouldn’t have to face the prospect of being separated from their beloved pets in order to find a home.”

Pros and Cons



Pros and cons

The pros and cons of renting with pets

Despite landlords largely believing pets are a bad thing in rented accommodation, there's plenty of research to suggest that they actually bring many benefits to both renters and landlords. Research shows that 97% of pet owning tenants consider their pet part of the family, and 17% pay a higher rent every month so their landlord will accommodate their pet¹¹.

What's more, mental health charities such as [mentalhealth.org](https://www.mentalhealth.org) and Mind highlight the benefits that having pets bring to people with depression, anxiety and conditions such as autism and ADHD. Pets are also recognised as extremely valuable companions for those suffering from loneliness¹², with one study revealing that owning a pet increases your chances of being happy and successful and nine out of ten pet owners claiming that they believe their pet is good for their health and well-being¹³. When it comes to damage, 88% of pet owners reveal they have never experienced any complaints and that their pets have never caused damage to the property¹⁴.

¹¹ One Poll and SpareRoom's survey of 3,193 pet owners, October 2018

¹² [Mentalhealth.org](https://www.mentalhealth.org)

¹³ [Independent.co.uk](https://www.independent.co.uk)

¹⁴ One Poll and SpareRoom's survey of 3,193 pet owners, October 2018

Pros and cons

One SpareRoom user, who would prefer to remain anonymous, commented:

“I love my cat and consider her to be my family member, not a toy I can buy and get rid of. There is lots of research that proves that animals have amazing positive effects on reducing human stress and increasing happiness. It makes me so sad that landlords and agencies don’t even consider animals, especially because some of them can be very clean and well behaved, which cannot be said about many humans.”



Pros and cons

Financial Journalist, Rosanna Spero explains when looking at the cost implications of having pets as a tenant, **“a positive side is if we’re happier, we’re more productive”**.

Translated to the workplace this would mean tenants work harder, potentially leading to promotion and higher pay, leaving them better able to afford higher rents. Their relationship with their landlord is also likely to be better as they are more content overall with their life.

However, it’s important to recognise that pet owners have responsibilities towards their animals and that irresponsible owners can cause real problems to landlords - and to pets.

“Whilst pets can have a very positive impact on those around them, it’s important to recognise that irresponsibly owned pets can be the cause of misery and suffering to the animals themselves, to those who live around them and to those who own and manage the properties in which they live”

- Rachel Williams, RSPCA.

Pros and cons

Veterinary Consultant Dr Robert White-Adams questions whether pet ownership should be seen as a basic right or a lifestyle choice:

“Owning a pet is a life choice that carries financial and social responsibilities, and it’s become an accepted fact that having a pet is as much of a right as having a mobile phone, TV or broadband, when it maybe shouldn’t be. A lot of the problems we see in the pet ownership field stem from the fact that over the last 25 - 30 years, our society seems to have removed accountability of being a responsible pet owner. It’s now much more acceptable to have an anti-social pet than it ever was before, and the number of pets, particularly dogs, seen in veterinary practice that have some level of behavioural concerns has been increasing steadily for years. This serves only to fuel landlords’ fears about the safety of their property.”

One landlord, Laura - a 55yr old a professional counsellor from London, commented on her experience of renting to pet owners:

“I’ve always been open to renting with pets. Animals are really important for the happiness and well-being of people and it’s incredibly hard to rent somewhere with a pet. When I’ve rented places with pets in the past I really struggled, I looked at 30 properties when I was looking for somewhere with my dog!”

Pros and cons

When asked about whether she charges an extra deposit to tenants with pets, Laura went on to say:

“I don’t charge an extra deposit, most pet owners are responsible people. I believe when tenants rent a property it becomes their property, it’s their space. They’re paying for that space so they need to be able to enjoy it, and maybe that’s with a pet”.

Lord Best is Chair of The Property Ombudsman and the All Party Parliamentary Group on Housing and Care for Older People. He also served as Chair of the Hanover Housing Association 2006-2015. He comments:

“Yes, there are tenants who let dogs mess or bark, and cause neighbours to complain. But more often dogs and cats increase neighbourliness: they break the ice between strangers and can become a source of collective affection! But it is for older residents that a dog or cat can make a life-changing difference - as an antidote to loneliness and constant companion.”

The Future



The Future

The future of renting with pets - possible solutions and next steps

Working to get damage by pets covered in insurance policies and by tenants

Kate Faulkner raises the point that in the current climate, even if a tenant has their own contents insurance policy that includes pets, it's still not always possible for landlords to be covered by their own insurance for any damage caused by pets.

SpareRoom therefore believes that more work needs to be done to encourage insurance companies to cover landlords on damage to their property by pets in their policies as part of the solution.

Another solution would be for the tenants themselves to sign a contract to say that they'd pay for any damages the pet was responsible for, which was a belief echoed in the Think Tank and also by pet owner and lecturer from Oxford, Mariana, who claims most responsible pet owners should be happy to accept accountability for damage caused by their pet.

The Future

One thing that landlords can do is charge a higher deposit to pet owners than non-pet owners to cover any damage to the property. The Think Tank uncovered the common belief that, regardless of the tenant, there may be damage at some point during a tenancy, whether because of a pet, a toddler or something else and that paying for these repairs is the tenant's responsibility. It was also voiced that damage by pets can be easily addressed with a bigger deposit upfront and that landlords would quickly see the value in renting to those with pets. However, it's important to note that the Tenant Fees Bill¹⁵ currently going through Parliament plans to cap deposits to a maximum of 6 weeks' rent, which could be detrimental to pet owners.

Research has also revealed that only 17% of tenants were asked by their landlord to pay more rent on the basis of having a pet at the property¹⁶, however it's suggested that an upfront fee for pets in properties might be seen as beneficial to both parties involved.

¹⁵ Tenant Fee Bills - <https://services.parliament.uk/bills/2017-19/tenantfees.html>

¹⁶ One Poll and SpareRoom's survey of 3,193 pet owners, October 2018

The Future

“I believe it would benefit both pet owners and landlords to implement something like an ‘extra pet fee’ or an extra deposit for the pet in case of damage. I’m sure a lot of pet owners wouldn’t mind having to pay £50 more per month to be able to move in with their pet, and it would significantly increase the landlord’s income.”

- Mariana, a pet owner from Oxford.

Dr Robert White- Adams added:

“£50 a month increase in rent to reflect the presence of a dog is a relatively small cost compared to the other costs associated with dog ownership. It may also help encourage potential pet owners to stop and think before buying a pet, reviewing all of the other responsibilities that come with that decision.”



The Future

It's also important to state that pet owners typically stay in rental properties for longer, due to being happy in their home and having found a place that allows their pet to live with them. Responsible pet owners are responsible tenants - if someone is mature enough to take good care of an animal, it is extremely likely that they'll treat a property with the same respect.

Dr Robert White- Adams comments:

“I let my own house to a very lovely couple that had a very lovely, well-cared for dog; their dog ownership was a key factor that gave me an impression of their responsibility.”

The Future

Creating a 'pet policy' - template for landlords and renters with pets

Another solution discussed in the Think Tank, and something SpareRoom is currently looking to implement, is creating a pet policy agreement between landlords and renters, which could be easily downloaded as a free template from the SpareRoom website. The template would include conditions such as 'regular landlord inspections' to check that the property is free of mess and damage, and to check in with neighbours that they're happy and have no issues with the pet.

The Future

SpareRoom would also consult with experts such as the RSPCA to determine points to be included as part of this policy, for instance:

- 1. Clear guidance on which pets are allowed, where they're allowed, where they're not, and how many pets a tenant can have**
- 2. A clear statement that the owner is responsible for their pet's welfare by law, as stated under the Animal Welfare Act 2006**
- 3. Conditions that tackle indiscriminate breeding and accidental ownership**
- 4. A clear policy on pets left behind**
- 5. Provision of pet care information**

This is based on existing best practice that the RSPCA has developed with providers in the social housing sector.

One thing to note is that where the property in question is an HMO (or other shared property) many landlords don't accept pets because they let out their house/flat by the room. This therefore needs to be taken into account so that landlords can ensure that the number and type of pets in the property at any one time is controlled and the property is suitable for pets.

The Future

Ensuring responsible pet ownership

As a legal requirement under the Animal Welfare Act, pet owners must be willing to take responsibility of their furry (and non-furry) friends, regardless of whether it makes it easier for landlords to consider and trust them – and their pets – as tenants.

An interesting topic of conversation, raised by vet Dr Robert White-Adams and Andrew Bucher of paws.com, was around launching a “vet a pet scheme” in the UK, which is similar to how they approach things in Switzerland.

The concept of this scheme is that, in order for a tenant to rent a property with a pet, they must get a signed form from a vet, which confirms they have a healthy, well-behaved dog (for example) and are a responsible pet owner.

“If a pet owner can’t get a vet to fill in a form saying ‘this dog is lovely’ then that tells me all I need to know about that dog or that owner. It is also shifting some of the onus back on the dog owner; if you want to have a dog and you want to rent a property, it becomes in your interest to ensure that your dog is socially acceptable and responsibly well-behaved.”

- Dr Robert White Adams, Vet.

The Future

Robert talked around a checklist of things that could be included as part of the “vet a pet” scheme to safeguard the pet and its environment and determine whether the pet and its owner pass the test. With a dog, for instance, a checklist could include whether it has been vaccinated, benefits from regular parasite control, exhibits good ‘doggy’ manners, and is responsive to basic training commands. For smaller pets, such as a rabbit, different criteria could be considered to demonstrate responsible pet ownership, such as the provision of vaccinations or neutering to reduce tendencies to scratch, scent mark with urine spraying or similar.

The need for some kind of training was reinforced by the recent RSPCA Needs of a Dog Report 2018. This revealed just 39% of dog owners attend or attended training classes, yet 93% of dog owners agree dogs should be trained in how to behave from an early age¹⁷. Another solution would be to enforce pet ownership courses to encourage the responsible ownership of pets.

¹⁷ RSPCA Needs of a Dog Report 2018

The Future

Pets in Social Housing

Another key point raised by members of the Think Tank committee was that they'd like to see a set policy that all social housing providers must take pets.

It was an echoed belief that by changing the policy around social housing, this would make renting to pet owners more 'normalised'. It would also help drive a change in culture for freeholders to allow leaseholders who own flats privately, and landlords who let them, to accept pets as the norm, potentially helping millions of tenants.

It's possible for a homeowner to own their property under leasehold and still be unable to own a pet as their freeholder forbids it. The SpareRoom think tank believes that this can, and should, be addressed in the upcoming review and restructuring of leasehold legislation.

The Future

Kate Faulkner commented that:

“If we can make it the norm for social housing to offer homes to pets that would be a good starting point. It’s claimed that currently only 6% of social housing accepts pets while some social housing providers such as Island Homes and councils including Leeds City Council allow pets. If these organisations have accepted pets as the norm, then other social housing providers have little excuse but to follow suit. The RSPCA already works with many social housing providers, recognising good practice through their PawPrints Awards scheme, and the knowledge and examples of how to make social housing pet friendly is out there. It just needs to be communicated better and spread far and wide by an organisation such as SpareRoom.”



The Future

Rachel Williams says of her experience as a leasehold homeowner:

“I bought my first flat in a purpose built, new build block last summer. The contract contains a clause that is a general prohibition on pets with a mention that some pets will be considered after submitting a formal letter to the management company, who looks after the building on behalf of the freeholder. There is no indication as to which animals they would consider however, just that dogs are not allowed in any circumstances. My flat wasn’t bought with a shared ownership model or anything like that, so other than my mortgage it’s all mine. It just seems remarkable and ridiculous that there is so little allowance for people that have pets - especially as the development includes shared grounds and a number of large duplex flats with three bedrooms and terraces the size of a small family home. If those of us who own our own homes can’t have animals, what hope is there for the rental sector?”.

Conclusion



Conclusion

Final thoughts

There's no reason tenants shouldn't be able to live with pets, subject to certain relevant conditions and checks being in place.

Companies such as SpareRoom can also help remove the stigma of renting to pet owners and encourage landlords to focus on the opportunities a pet owning tenant may provide.

By finding the obstacles and removing them, as well as seeing the positives, not just the negatives, we should be able to make it much easier for people to have a pet, whether they own their home or not.





Statistics

Top 5 Reasons for a Landlord not Allowing Pet¹⁸

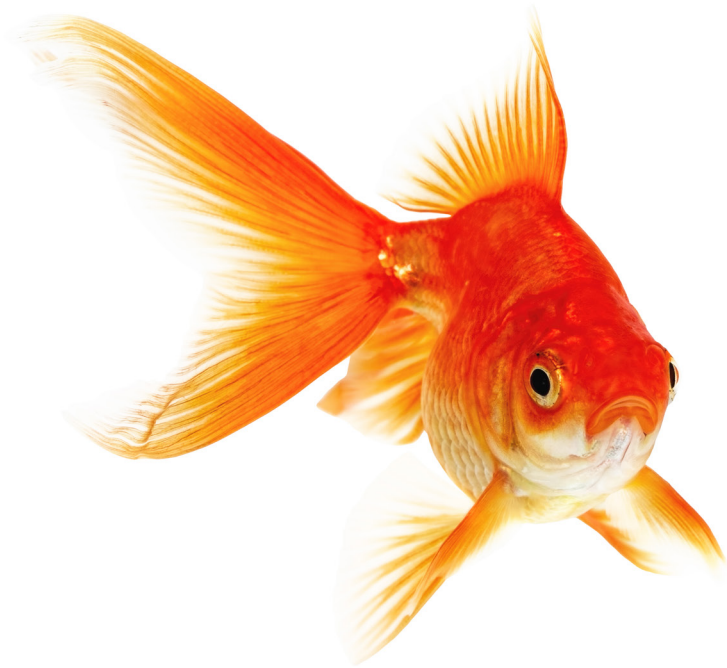
1. They're worried the pets will smell 57%
2. They're worried about damage to their property caused by pets 55%
3. They're worried that the pets aren't trained 37%
4. They're worried about noise complaints 36%
5. They feel their property isn't suitable 36%

¹⁸ SpareRoom's survey of 1,261 landlords, October 2018

Statistics

Top 5 Pets Landlords are Most Likely to Accept¹⁹

1. Fish 68%
2. Cat 32%
3. Dog 24%
4. Rodent 24%
5. Bird 21%



¹⁹. SpareRoom's survey of 1,261 landlords, October 2018

Statistics

Top 5 Pets That Tenants Would Most Like to Have²⁰

1. Dog 73%
2. Cat 58%
3. Rodent (e.g. hamster, gerbil) 12%
4. Rabbit 12%
5. Fish 12%

²⁰ SpareRoom's survey of 3,483 non pet owners, October 2018

A group of four people and three dogs are gathered around a wooden table in a room with a red brick wall and large windows. A woman in the center holds a large, fluffy golden retriever. To her left, another woman holds a small brown and white dog. To her right, a man holds a small tan dog. A fourth person is partially visible on the far left. The table has a white cup, a smartphone, and some cards. The SpareRoom logo is overlaid in the center.

 SpareRoom