

# FRESHWELL HEALTH CENTRE HS036 ASSISTANCE DOGS AND OTHER ANIMALS POLICY

Document Name:	HS036 Assistance dogs and other Animals policy				
Organisation:	Freshwell Health Centre				
Current Version Number:	1.0				
Current Document Approved By:	David Shedden Practice Manager				
Author and Role:	Practice Index & J Terris Operations Manager				
Date Approved:	03.06.2025				
Document Revision and Approval History					
Version	Date	Version Created By	Version Approved By	Equality Impact Considered	Comments
1.0	03.06.2025	Practice index/ J Terris	D Shedden	D Shedden	New policy updates supported by team leads and ECL sensory team
1.1					

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## 1 Introduction

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### 1.1 Policy statement

This policy predominantly supports those patients and employees who may have the need for an assistance dog but also refers to therapy animals, pets and other animals that may visit the Freshford Practice. Under the [Equality Act 2010](#), assistance dogs, guide dogs, hearing dogs, medical alert dogs and their owners have the same rights to access this Practice as everyone else.

### 1.2 Status

In accordance with the [Equality Act 2010](#), we have considered how provisions within this policy might impact on different groups and individuals. This document and any procedures contained within it are non-contractual, which means they may be modified or withdrawn at any time. They apply to all employees and contractors working for the Practice.

## 2 Policy

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### 2.1 Requirement

Assistance dogs are welcome at the Freshford Practice as we are committed to providing services that are equally accessible and responsive to all sections of the community. This includes assistance dogs in training along with their walker or sponsor. Other types of animals that are permitted within this Practice are detailed at [Chapter 4](#).

### 2.2 Definition

The [Equality Act 2010](#) defines an assistance dog as:

- A dog that has been trained to guide a blind person
- A dog that has been trained to assist a deaf person
- A dog that has been trained by a prescribed charity to assist a disabled person who has a disability that consists of epilepsy or otherwise affects the person's mobility, manual dexterity, physical co-ordination or ability to lift, carry or otherwise move everyday objects
- A dog of a prescribed category that has been trained to assist a disabled person who has a disability (other than those described above)

Assistance dogs are working dogs that have been rigorously trained by the following associations:

Canine Partners  
Dog A.I.D  
Dogs for Good  
Dogs for the Disabled  
Guide Dogs for the Blind  
Hearing Dogs for Deaf People

Medical Detection Dogs  
Service Dogs UK  
Support Dogs  
The Seeing Dogs Alliance  
Veterans with Dogs

Registered assistance dogs are working animals, not pets, and are relied on by their owners for independence. Each charity will have their own agreements outlining the expectations and responsibilities of the owner. They will also regularly monitor the owner and the dog to ensure their expectations are fulfilled.

Information about these charities can be found at [www.assisteddogs.org.uk](http://www.assisteddogs.org.uk).

## 2.3 Types of working dogs

In healthcare settings, there has been an increase in the number of working therapy dogs that help people with physical conditions and assist with mental wellbeing. The two main classifications of therapy dog are:

- Animal-assisted therapy (AAT) which is delivered in conjunction with other healthcare professionals and is ordinarily goal directed with the outcomes documented and evaluated
- Animal-assisted activity (AAA) is the term used when a handler brings a dog to the patient/resident for general interaction. These dogs are usually owned by the person who is their handler. This is also termed as being an emotional support animal (ESA) and further information on this can be found in the [Emotional Support Animals \(UK\)](#) website. ESAs are pets that are required for a person's ongoing mental health treatment or for their hidden disability.

Due to the nature of primary care, therapy dogs are unlikely to be needed within this Practice. Likewise, ESAs do not have the same legal recognition as an assistance dog.

## 2.4 Training and identity of an assistance dog

While the Practice can request to see identity for an assistance dog, it should be noted that it is not a legal requirement for assistance dogs to have been trained by a charity, nor for them to carry any specific identification. Therefore, without any specific formal training, there can be no 'proof of ID' to suggest that the animal is an assistance dog.

At this Practice, staff will always request to see the identity document when an assistance dog is visiting the premises. While it is understood that this may not be available, this good practice is seen as being a reasonable request as it guarantees the high standards of training, and that the animal has also been treated for fleas and worms.

Further reading on training and identity can be found within the Equality and Human Rights Commission guidance titled [Assistance dogs: A guide for businesses and service providers](#) and the [Assistance Dogs UK](#) website.

## 2.5 Access within the Practice

Assistance dogs are permitted to enter most areas of the Practice including patient facing areas and clinical rooms, i.e., a GP consulting room and, in most cases, a Practice Nurse's room. An assistance dog is not permitted to enter any area that is considered to be the most 'IPC sensitive' within the practice, such as a treatment room where minor surgery is undertaken. Any area should be seen as being similar to an operating theatre in secondary care.

When the assistance dog is not permitted to enter, the owner will be requested to ensure alternative arrangements are made for the short period while they are receiving their treatment. In these instances, the patient should be advised that it is the Practice's wish to minimise any separation time from their dog.

Further reading is detailed within the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) guidance [Working with Dogs in Health Care Settings](#).

New signage will be bought and displayed at eye level (June 2025). Consideration will be given to put one also on the door from the lobby to the corridor and waiting area. We will add a note to our website, TV screen and also social media, that the practice will only admit assistance dogs. Anyone bringing in other dogs will have to be challenged by staff.

## **Risk assessment**

A risk assessment to support animals within the practice is required to ensure that measures are adopted to suit the Practice's needs. Risk measures should include any additional IPC requirements and actions needed when an assistance dog is not permitted to enter.

A risk assessment template is at [Annex A](#) which details all types of visiting animal.

## **2.6 Maintaining infection control measures**

Should there be any animal body fluids that need to be cleared, the owner will be requested to clear it up if they are able to do so. If not, this should be treated the same as the normal procedure as for human waste. Personal protective equipment should be worn and all surfaces cleaned with the appropriate cleaning solution.

Following attendance by an assistance dog to the Practice, the cleaning staff are to be made aware of any areas that the assistance dog visited. This will enable them to provide a higher level of cleaning to these areas. For further detailed information, see the Practice's Infection Prevention Control Handbook.

## **2.7 Staff responsibilities**

To help staff identify an assistance dog, the dog will always be wearing a harness, their behaviour will be impeccable as they will lay under their owners' feet when they are seated and not move until their owner moves. They do not have to have a licence or certification to show, no formal documentation is required.

Physical contact with a dog by clinical staff will be resisted during any consultation or examination. All clinical staff must ensure good hand washing with soap and water after any contact with an assistance dog to ensure the safety of other patients.

Clinical staff are to be mindful following any attendance of an assistance dog that they then consider other patients in their surgery list for that session who are potentially adverse clinically to the presence of dogs. This may include patients who:

- Have an allergy to animals, especially dogs
- Are immunosuppressed
- Have a phobia of dogs
- Another medical reason

Other staff are to ensure that following any physical contact with the assistance dog they also promote good hand hygiene.

Make a note on the REMINDER screen for patients who have an assistance dog to help colleagues know which animals are registered and permitted access.

## **2.8 Owner's responsibilities**

The owner has a responsibility to ensure their assistance dog is well behaved and supervised throughout the visit and must ensure an assistance dog:

- Is physically fit before visiting the practice. If pets become ill, diagnosis and treatment by a vet must be sought
- Is kept on a lead throughout the visit and clearly identified as an assistance dog
- Is discouraged from jumping, scratching and licking
- Does not come into contact with open wounds
- Is of an acceptable hygienic standard, i.e., not wet, muddy etc.
- Is exercised and has had its toileting and feeding requirements met
- Has claws trimmed to reduce the risk of scratches
- Is regularly groomed and checked for signs of infection or other illness
- Has received the relevant inoculations and is wormed on a regular basis

## **2.9 Injury sustained from an assistance dog**

Should an animal bite and injure any person, first aid is to be administered and the incident recorded in the accident log. It is recommended that the incident be recorded as a significant event to facilitate learning and prevent future similar incidents. For further detailed information, see CL004 Significant Event and Incident Reporting Policy.

**England only:** Should the police become involved, then the Care Quality Commission is to be informed as this is considered a [notifiable incident](#).

# **3 Employees with an assistance dog**

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## **3.1 Requests**

New or existing members of staff considering the need to apply for an assistance dog should apply to the Practice Manager who will seek advice from the occupational health service and a workplace assessment is likely to be required. In addition, any employee who requires an assistance dog will also require a personal emergency evacuation plan (PEEP). For further detailed information, see the Practice's Health, Safety and Risk Management Handbook.

Prior to any assistance dog arriving with the employee, arrangements will be made with the relevant charity to carry out appropriate training with other practice staff.

### **3.2 Employee's responsibilities**

The employee/assistance dog owner will always be responsible for the behaviour of the dog and, to maintain a clean environment, they must clean any mess the dog leaves or, should this be difficult due to their disability, the employee is then to inform another member of the team to request support.

### **3.3 Reasonable adjustments**

The Practice Manager will ensure that specific space will be made available for the dog and its bed. Changes to working hours will be considered to allow for short breaks for exercise and toileting purposes. For further detailed information, see HR031 Flexible Working Policy.

## **4 Other animals**

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### **4.1 Therapy dogs**

The RCN guidance, [Working with Dogs in Health Care Settings](#), discusses therapy dogs and animal assisted intervention and how this supports patients within a healthcare setting. Due to the nature of primary care, it is unlikely that there is any need for therapy dogs although larger multidisciplinary health centres may utilise therapy dogs.

### **4.2 Pets**

The Freshford Practice will adhere to the guidance detailed in the RCN's [Working with Dogs in Health Care Settings](#) whereby pets are not permitted into healthcare settings unless in exceptional circumstances. This applies to staff members. However, should a pet be allowed into the Practice, it will be requested that the owner completes a risk assessment (see [Annex A](#)) to detail their knowledge and requirements of the pet. This risk assessment is to also confirm if employees have any allergies or phobias to animals. The owner's responsibilities remain the same as detailed at [Section 2.9](#).

### **4.3 Visiting animals**

At this Practice and at the discretion of the management team, animals may be permitted to enter the premises as visitors or therapy animals. As part of the risk assessment, it has been agreed this is acceptable and those risks associated with the organisation's premises mitigated. This matter has been discussed with the organisation's insurer.

### **4.4 Injury sustained from non-assistance animal**

Actions are as per [Section 2.10](#). Should a pet animal injure any person, then recourse is to be taken against the pet owner. If a visiting animal causes injury, then recourse is likely to be taken against the Partners.

## Annex A – Assistance dog risk assessment

<b>Risk assessment title</b>	<b>Assistance dogs</b>	<b>Date of assessment</b>	<b>22/05/2025</b>
<b>Assessment conducted by</b>	<b>J Terris (Ops Mgr)</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>222/05/2026</b>
<b>Contributors</b>	<b>D Shedden (PM)</b>	<b>Risk reference</b>	<b>06/24</b>

What are the potential hazards?	Who is at risk of being harmed and how?	What are you already doing to control the risks?	Risk rating	Additional control measures required	To be implemented: by who, by when?	Residual risk
Infection	Staff, patients, contractors, visitors due to contact with the animal	<p>Effective IPC processes in place</p> <p>Dogs are well trained and are limited to where they can go</p> <p>Effective cleaning programme in place</p> <p>Robust hand hygiene measures in place</p>	9	<p>Signage to be displayed, warning all that only assistance dogs/therapy animals are permitted onto the premises</p> <p>Ensure hand hygiene signage is placed throughout the premises</p>	<p>Ops Mgr – 22/05/2025</p> <p>Ops Mgr – 22/05/2025</p>	6
Phobia	Staff, patients, contractors and visitors could experience nervousness, anxiety	Such individuals can, so far as is reasonably practicable, remove themselves from the situation	6	Remind all staff members to inform their line manager if they have a phobia so that this can be recorded in the risk assessment and measures taken	Ops Mgr – ongoing	6

	etc. due to an existing phobia					
Aggressive animal	Staff, patients, contractors and visitors are at risk of injury due to an animal becoming aggressive	All assistance dogs are appropriately trained and some wear ID badges showing they are registered	9	Remind all animal owners that when on the organisation's premises they are responsible for ensuring they always control their pets and they are not to be left unattended	Ops Mgr – ongoing	6
Evacuation	Staff, patients, contractors and visitors with assistance dogs may need assistance to evacuate the building in an emergency	<p>Patients, contractors and visitors will need to be considered in the General Emergency Evacuation Plan (GEEP)</p> <p>Employees will require an individual Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan (PEEP)</p>	9	Review the GEEP and PEEPs regularly ensuring they remain fit for purpose	Ops Mgr – ongoing	6



		Likelihood				
		1 Rare	2 Unlikely	3 Possible	4 Likely	5 Almost certain
Consequence	5 Catastrophic	5 Moderate	10 High	15 Extreme	20 Extreme	25 Extreme
	4 Major	4 Moderate	8 High	12 High	16 Extreme	20 Extreme
	3 Moderate	3 Low	6 Moderate	9 High	12 High	15 Extreme
	2 Minor	2 Low	4 Moderate	6 Moderate	8 High	10 High
	1 Negligible	1 Low	2 Low	3 Low	4 Moderate	6 Moderate