The Village Practice, Cowplain
Assistance/Therapy dogs Policy

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1.0	November 2025	Karen Jeffries	Mikala Millard	

Introduction

The Equality Act makes it unlawful for disabled people to be treated less favourably than people to whom the disabilities do not apply and assistance dogs, guide dogs, hearing dogs, medical alert dogs and their owners have the same rights to access this practice as everyone else.

Under Section 29 of the Equality Act, the Practice is legally obliged to make all reasonable adjustments to ensure that disabled people have equal access to our services. Assistance Dogs are a vital and central element of support to many individuals with a disability.

This policy aims to:

- Minimise the restrictions of access to Assistance Dogs.
- Reduce the potential for distress to owners of and the Assistance Dogs themselves.
- Inform staff and other Patients on the requirements for Assistance Dogs.
- Minimise the time that Assistance Dogs and owners have to be separated.

The Village Practice is committed to providing services that are equally accessible and responsive to all sections of the community.

This policy is intended to facilitate the best interests for Assistance Dog users, the Assistance Dogs themselves and our staff.

All Practice Staff should have a clear understanding of the Assistance Dog Policy and be aware of the different types of support provided by Assistance Dogs and the support needs of patients when the patient or visitor has been separated from the Assistance Dog. It is important that staff recognise the Assistance Dog is a working dog and should try to minimise distractions.

1.1. Definition of Assistance Dog

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:

- Guide Dogs for the Blind
- Hearing Dogs for Deaf People
- Support Dogs
- Dogs for the Disabled
- Canine Partners
- Dog A.I.D
- Medical Detection Dogs
- Dogs for Good
- Service Dogs UK
- 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.assistancedogs.org.uk.

It is important to note that there is no legal requirement for assistance dogs to have been trained by a charity, or for them to carry specific identification, therefore there is no 'proof' that can be requested. Without any identity or any proof of training, it is not possible to confirm whether the animal is a pet or an assistance dog.

Further to this, in healthcare settings, there has been a significant growth in the number of working therapy dogs that help people with physical conditions and also 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, 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 here. 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 organisation. Likewise, ESAs do not have the same legal recognition as an assistance dog.

1.1.1. Types of Assistance Dogs:

- **Guide Dogs** assist people who are blind or are visually impaired. They usually wear a white working harness with yellow reflectors and tags on their collar.

- **Hearing Dogs** assist people who are deaf or are hearing impaired.

A Hearing Dog communicates by touching its owner then indicating the source of the sound. The dog will alert its owner to a variety of sounds including doorbell, smoke alarm, baby alarm, and alarm clock.

Practice Staff should be aware that Hearing Dogs may jump up onto their companion if telephones or alarms sound.

1.1.2. Typical standards of behaviour of Assistance Dogs

Assistance Dogs are highly trained certified animals and distinguishable from pets in the following ways:

- Wearing a special harness and collar tag.
- Are carefully taught how to be well behaved in public places.
- Will sit or lie quietly on the floor next to its owner.
- Are trained to go to the toilet on command.

Assistance Dogs are exempt from usual hygiene rules by the Institute of Environmental Health Officers and their owners are given a card to carry with them which explains this.

1.2. Hygiene and Cleanliness Guidance

When an Assistance Dog is / has been on the Practice Premises, particular attention will be given to hygiene and cleanliness.

1.2.1. Hand Hygiene

All staff must ensure good hand washing with soap and water or use of alcohol hand gel prior to and after any contact with an Assistance Dog. This will ensure the safety of all Patients and the Assistance Dog.

All Patients that come into contact with, or handle an Assistance Dog will be encouraged to wash their hands with soap and water.

All Assistance Dog owners should wash their hands with soap and water after handling their Assistance Dog and before coming into contact with Patients.

1.2.2. General Cleanliness

All areas of the Practice where an Assistance Dog has been is to be reported to the Practice Cleaning Staff who will ensure it is thoroughly cleaned with general purpose detergent.

Any equipment that has come into contact with the Assistance Dog should be cleaned with general purpose detergent or alcohol impregnated wipes where the use of general purpose detergent is inappropriate.

If necessary, all animal body fluids should be treated as human waste. Personal Protective Equipment should be worn and all surfaces cleaned with the appropriate cleaning solution.

1.3. General Guidance

Upon identifying that a Patient is the Owner of an Assistance Dog, the Practice will place an alert of the patient record so measures below are followed if a face to face appointment is booked.

Face to face appointment:

Patient will be informed to remain outside until their appointment time, in case of any patients in waiting room with an allergy. Patients are asked to notify the reception desk of their arrival and return to the outside space, Should the patient require a chair, the reception staff will be happy to provide this.

Patients are asked not to arrive early for their appointment and the Clinician will do their best to see them on time. The clinician will collect the patient and dog from outside and they should leave via the back door. This will eliminate the need for unnecessary time in the practice.

The Assistance Dog is to stay with the Patient at all times, even if they require tests or treatment. During consultations and examinations, actual physical contact with an Assistance Dog by Practice Clinical Staff will be avoided if possible.

When it is known that an Assistance Dog will be accompanying a Patient for a consultation, the Practice will make this known on the clinic by adding a comment to the appointment.

Should the only available clinician have reasonable reason to decline treatment due to their own medical conditions or beliefs the Practice will make reasonable measures to provide an alternative appointment, this may be on another day.

Should an incident occur which involves an Assistance Dog, the Practice will create a 'Significant Event' record.

1.4. Assistance Dog Owner's Responsibilities

Additionally, they are to ensure that their 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 is 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

Members of staff are not responsible for the care of Assistance Dogs.

Practice Reception staff will advise the owner on arrival at the Practice that in the event an Assistance Dog fouls anywhere on Practice Premises, it is the owner's responsibility to report this and to clean/remove this from the Practice.

The owner should follow the Practice infection control policy, including the use of hand gel provided for all Patients and visitors.

1.5. Other Pets

No other pets should be bought into the practice premises without prior agreement with the practice as this may pose an issue for other patients, staff or visitors.

Agreement would need to be sought prior to each potential visit with notice to allow the surgery to contact staff and patients also due to be at the practice. If agreement has been sort and sanctioned by the practice the owner is responsible for their animal's behaviour and should ensure that it is correctly controlled.

Staff can request that the animal is removed at any point if it is causing distress, disruption or harm to a patient, staff member or visitor, which may mean that the patient/owner needs to be prepared that this may mean missing or cutting short their appointment.

1.6. 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.

Should the police become involved, the Care Quality Commission is to be informed as this is considered a notifiable incident.