

Deafblind Scotland Policy on Assistance Dogs in the Work Place

Introduction

The Equality Act makes it unlawful for disabled people to be treated less favourably than people to whom the disabilities do not apply although it does recognise limited circumstances in which there may be 'justification' for treating a disabled person less favourably.

Under the Equality Act, the employer 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 others of the requirements for Assistance Dogs.
- Minimise the time that Assistance Dogs and owners have to be separated.

Policy Statement

Deafblind Scotland is committed to providing services that are equally accessible and responsive to all sections of the community.

To that effect, Assistance Dogs are welcome to have access to all areas of the building with the exception of any high risk area and kitchen facilities.

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

All Staff should have a clear understanding of the Assistance Dog Policy and be aware of the different types of support provided by Assistance Dogs. It is important that staff recognise the Assistance Dog is a working dog and should try to minimise distractions.

Definition of Assistance Dog

An Assistance Dog is one which has been specifically trained to assist a person with a specific disability and which has been qualified by one of the organisations registered as a member of Assistance Dogs (UK):

- Guide Dogs for the Blind Association
- Hearing Dogs for Deaf People
- Dogs for the Disabled

- Canine Partners
- Support Dogs

All Assistance Dogs will have formal identification and have been granted certification by the Department of Health on the basis that the dog's high standards of training, behaviour, health and welfare are such that it should be permitted to accompany its owner at all times and in all places within the United Kingdom.

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. A Guide Dog with a red and white harness indicates the owner is deafblind.
- **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 door bell, smoke alarm, baby alarm, and alarm clock. Staff should be aware that Hearing Dogs may jump up onto their companion if telephones or alarms sound. They wear a burgundy coloured coat with "Hearing Dog" written on the coat.
- **Assistance Dogs, Support Dogs or Dogs for the Disabled** assist people with many different tasks ranging from alerting people when their owner has a seizure, carrying items, loading and unloading washing machines and many other tasks. They wear a purple coloured coat.

Typical standards of behaviour of Assistance Dogs

Assistance Dogs are highly trained 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.

Hygiene and Cleanliness Guidance

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

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 staff and the Assistance Dog.

All staff 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 staff or work stations.

General Cleanliness

All areas where an Assistance Dog has been will be advised to the 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 an appropriate disinfecting solution.

General Guidance

Upon identifying that an employee or visitor is the Owner of an Assistance Dog, a staff member will identify someone to escort the Owner, accompanied by their Assistance Dog, to visit and walk around the premises to familiarise themselves with the layout and routes within the premises, including access and egress routes and locations of toilets, fire exits and assembly areas, consulting rooms.

A staff member will liaise with the Owner to conduct repeat visits to act as 'refresher training' on an as-needed basis.

In the event that the owner requires that the dog be left in a suitable area for a short period, staff will do their utmost to keep it in a quiet area, office or room for the owner.

When it is known that an Assistance Dog will be on the premises for any reason, the staff member will carry out a review of the known needs of others scheduled to attend that particular day who have previously been identified as presenting a reasonable objection to an Assistance Dog being present in the area as a result of:

- Medical conditions or allergies associated with dogs
- Mental health issues with dogs including reasonable fear of dogs.

In this event, the staff member will do their utmost to make alternative arrangements. It can be useful to have a room which is kept free from assistance dogs for this purpose.

N.B. Objections under religious beliefs are not considered reasonable. (This may be a concern for Muslim individuals as within the Muslim faith, dogs are generally seen

in a negative context. In 2003, the Sharia Council, based in the United Kingdom, ruled that a ban on dogs does not apply to Guide Dogs).

Should an incident occur which involves an Assistance Dog, the Health and Safety Officer will create a 'Significant Event' record.

Assistance Dog Owner's Responsibilities

It is the owner's responsibility to ensure that the Assistance Dog's toileting and feeding requirements are met.

It is the owner's responsibility to ensure the dog is suitably groomed, clean and dry prior to progressing beyond the reception area.

Staff with assistance dogs will be provided with a locker in which to keep relevant Assistance Dog equipment, including towels.

Staff with Assistance dogs are responsible for ensuring that rest areas are kept clean and bedding is removed and laundered at least weekly or more frequently as required.

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

Reception staff will advise the owner on arrival that in the event an Assistance Dog fouls inside the Premises, it is the owner's responsibility to report this to a member of staff so that arrangements can be made to support the owner to clean and sanitize the area.

The owner should ensure the dog is fit and well, and care regimes follow guidance provided by Assistance Dogs UK.

The owner should follow the Organisational Infection Control Policy, including the use of hand gel provided for all staff and visitors.

Assistance Dogs in the Workplace -

How should I behave towards the dog?

The important thing to remember is that an assistance dog is a working animal, not an ordinary pet. It expects to work with its owner and knows that when it's wearing the harness, it is on duty. When the dog is working it needs to concentrate on the job in hand (or paw!), so it's very important that you don't distract it by touching, feeding or talking to it. When the dog's harness is off, it should behave like a well-trained pet dog.

Where will the dog stay during the day?

When it's not working, the dog should rest quietly and undisturbed. The owner will provide a dog bed or blanket which should be placed in a draught-free position close to their desk or workbench. If the owner's work space is unsuitable for a dog, for example because of industrial machinery, the relevant Assistance Dog Organisation may be able to help with providing a kennel and run.

Can I talk to the dog?

Like all dogs, assistance dogs enjoy attention, and unless it's on duty the answer will often be "yes" – but please always ask the owner first! It's important not to overwhelm or overexcite the dog, particularly when it's settling in to the work environment, so please don't be offended if the owner asks you not to talk to the dog.

Can I feed the dog?

Definitely not! All assistance dogs are fed a carefully balanced diet and extras or titbits will affect their health and the way they work. We also recommend you keep your own food – sandwiches for example well out of temptation's way!

Can I play with the dog?

An assistance dog has been trained to lie quietly where it's placed, so it's a great help if you don't encourage it to run around in the workplace. It may have some toys to play with but they should not be noisy ones, and the dog won't be allowed to chase them around the work area.

When does the dog go out?

For the first few weeks, the owner may need to take the dog out for five minutes to relieve itself three or four times a day. Once the dog has settled in and is used to the routine, one or two longer breaks will normally be enough.

Where does the dog relieve itself?

The assistance dog owner, together with their employer and an assistance Dogs instructor, will identify the most suitable place nearby, which may be on the premises or off-site. The dog owner will take the dog to the relief area.

Who looks after the dog?

Caring for the dog is the owner's responsibility. The dog is taken to the vet for a health check every six months and is routinely wormed and vaccinated. The owner grooms the dog regularly to keep it clean and to try to reduce the number of hairs it leaves on the carpet. The dog is fed at home, and it is the owner's responsibility to ensure that water is available at work.

What happens if the dog misbehaves?

Applying appropriate discipline is part of the dog owner's responsibility. There is no reason for you to put up with disruption caused by the dog misbehaving. If problems do occur, please discuss them with the owner, who will be keen to make sure that his or her dog isn't a nuisance. If the problem isn't resolved, you can contact the appropriate assistance dog team for help and advice. It's always easier for them to deal with things sooner rather than later, so please don't let matters get out of hand before saying something.

Does someone check on the dog's work?

Each dog and owner is visited at least once a year to check the dog's skills and to ensure that all is well. Several visits to the workplace may be necessary in the early settling-in days, and then annually. If difficulties arise, an instructor will come more often to offer support and advice.