

Waypoint Church Dog Policy

Policy Owner: Senior Leadership Team

Approved By: Trustees / Senior Leadership Team

Effective From: 25th August 2026

Review Date: 25th August 2027

1. Purpose

1.1 Waypoint Church is committed to providing a safe, welcoming and accessible environment in which all people can participate in worship and church activities.

1.2 Waypoint Church recognises that dogs are important companions to many people and that assistance dogs provide essential support to some disabled people.

1.3 Waypoint Church also recognises that the presence of dogs may cause fear, anxiety or significant distress to some children and adults, and that some people have allergies or other health concerns relating to dogs.

1.4 This Policy establishes the circumstances in which dogs may be present at Waypoint Church and is intended to balance the wellbeing and safety of the wider church community with the legal rights of disabled people who require assistance dogs.

2. Scope

2.1 This Policy applies to the presence of dogs within Waypoint Church premises during Sunday morning worship gatherings.

2.2 The Senior Leadership Team may determine separate arrangements for other church activities, events or use of the premises where the circumstances require.

3. General Prohibition

3.1 Dogs are not permitted inside Waypoint Church during Sunday morning worship gatherings.

3.2 This prohibition applies to all pet, companion and other non-assistance dogs, irrespective of their breed, size, temperament, training or behaviour.

3.3 The prohibition is not a judgement on dog ownership or on individual dogs. It reflects Waypoint Church's responsibility to provide an environment in which the whole church community can participate safely and without unnecessary distress.

4. Rationale

4.1 Waypoint Church has adopted this Policy having regard to:

- a. the safeguarding and wellbeing of children and young people;
- b. the fact that some children and adults experience fear or anxiety around dogs;
- c. the particular distress that the presence of dogs may cause to some people with additional needs;
- d. the needs of people who have allergies to dogs;
- e. the potential for dogs to cause distraction, disruption, injury or damage; and
- f. the need to provide a predictable and accessible environment for worship.

4.2 Waypoint Church considers that a clear and consistently applied prohibition on non-assistance dogs is preferable to assessing individual dogs on a case-by-case basis. A dog's being friendly or well behaved does not remove the potential impact on another person's wellbeing.

5. Assistance Dogs

5.1 Assistance dogs are permitted inside Waypoint Church during Sunday morning worship gatherings.

5.2 For the purposes of this Policy, an assistance dog is a dog which provides assistance to a disabled person in connection with their disability.

5.3 Assistance dogs are not treated as pets for the purposes of this Policy.

5.4 Assistance dogs may support people with a range of disabilities or medical conditions, including visual or hearing impairment, epilepsy, diabetes, mobility difficulties and other physical or mental impairments.

5.5 Waypoint Church will comply with its obligations under the Equality Act 2010, including the duty to make reasonable adjustments for disabled people. The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) states that a service provider's no-dogs policy should be adjusted to permit access for assistance dogs where required. ([Equality and Human Rights Commission](#))

6. Verification of Assistance Dogs

6.1 Waypoint Church will not require a person to produce a registration certificate, identification card or other formal certification as a condition of access for an assistance dog.

6.2 There is no statutory UK-wide registration or certification scheme for assistance dogs, and there is no legal requirement for an assistance dog to have been trained by a particular organisation. ([Equality and Human Rights Commission](#))

6.3 Staff and volunteers should therefore not challenge or embarrass a person by demanding evidence of their disability or certification of their dog.

6.4 Where there is genuine uncertainty about whether a dog is an assistance dog, the matter should be dealt with discreetly and, where necessary, referred to a member of the Senior Leadership Team.

7. Conduct and Control of Assistance Dogs

7.1 An assistance dog must remain under the control of its owner or handler at all times.

7.2 The owner or handler remains responsible for the care and behaviour of the dog while on Waypoint Church premises.

7.3 Assistance dogs should, as far as reasonably practicable:

- a. remain with their owner or handler;
- b. remain beside or underneath their owner's seat;
- c. not wander freely around the premises;
- d. not approach or interact with other people unless invited or required to do so;
- e. not interfere with worship or other activities; and
- f. not create an unreasonable health or safety risk.

7.4 These requirements are intended to protect both the assistance-dog user and other members of the church community.

8. Allergies and Other Health Considerations

8.1 Waypoint Church recognises that some people have allergies to dogs and will take such concerns seriously.

8.2 The presence of an allergy does not, in itself, justify excluding an assistance dog. The EHRC advises that reasonable steps should instead be taken to minimise or avoid contact between an identifiable person with an allergy and an assistance dog. ([Equality and Human Rights Commission](#))

8.3 Where reasonably practicable, Waypoint Church may implement measures such as:

- a. allocating separate seating areas;
- b. maintaining appropriate distance between the dog and the person affected;
- c. avoiding unnecessary contact between the dog and other people;
- d. appropriate cleaning of affected areas; and
- e. other reasonable measures appropriate to the circumstances.

8.4 The aim will be to accommodate both the assistance-dog user and the person with the allergy wherever reasonably practicable.

9. Safeguarding and Wellbeing

9.1 Waypoint Church's safeguarding responsibilities extend to creating an environment in which children, young people and adults can participate without avoidable fear or distress.

9.2 Where a member of the congregation has a particular vulnerability, anxiety or additional need relating to dogs, the Senior Leadership Team should consider reasonable practical measures to support that person.

9.3 Information concerning an individual's disability, medical condition or personal circumstances must be treated sensitively and should only be shared with those who need the information for the purpose of providing appropriate support.

10. Dogs Causing a Safety or Disruption Concern

10.1 Where an assistance dog is causing a genuine and significant safety, health or disruption concern, the matter should be addressed on the basis of the dog's actual behaviour and the circumstances of the particular case.

10.2 The owner or handler should, wherever reasonably practicable, first be given the opportunity to resolve the issue.

10.3 Reasonable measures may include:

- a. moving seating;
- b. creating additional space around the dog;
- c. separating the dog from another person where reasonably necessary;
- d. asking the owner or handler to maintain closer control of the dog; or
- e. making another reasonable adjustment to enable continued participation.

10.4 Any decision to refuse or terminate access for an assistance dog should be made by a member of the Senior Leadership Team wherever reasonably practicable.

10.5 Exclusion of an assistance dog should only be considered where there is a specific and sufficiently serious reason and after reasonable alternatives have been considered.

11. Emotional Support and Companion Animals

11.1 Waypoint Church recognises that animals can provide emotional comfort and support.

11.2 However, an animal described as an emotional support animal, therapy animal or companion animal is not automatically an assistance dog for the purposes of the Equality Act 2010.

11.3 The EHRC confirms that emotional support animals are not defined as assistance dogs under the Equality Act 2010. However, depending upon the individual circumstances, allowing such an animal may potentially constitute a reasonable adjustment for a disabled person. ([Equality and Human Rights Commission](#))

11.4 Where an individual states that they require their dog for disability-related reasons but the status of the dog is unclear, the matter should be referred to the Senior Leadership Team for consideration of the circumstances and any applicable reasonable adjustment.

12. Responsibilities of Dog Owners

12.1 A person bringing a dog to Waypoint Church remains responsible for the dog's behaviour, welfare and any damage or injury caused by the dog.

12.2 Where a non-assistance dog is brought to a Sunday morning worship gathering, the owner will be asked to make alternative arrangements for the dog.

12.3 Dogs must not be left unattended immediately outside Waypoint Church where doing so could obstruct entrances, create a safety risk or interfere with people entering or leaving the building.

13. Implementation

13.1 The Senior Leadership Team will ensure that appropriate staff and volunteers are aware of this Policy.

13.2 The Policy should be applied consistently and courteously.

13.3 Staff and volunteers should not enter into prolonged discussions concerning the Policy at the entrance to a worship gathering. Where a disagreement arises, the matter should be referred to a member of the Senior Leadership Team.

13.4 No person should be publicly challenged, embarrassed or treated disrespectfully in relation to this Policy.

14. Communication

14.1 The following wording may be used on signage and church communications:

Dogs at Waypoint Church

To help us provide a safe and accessible environment for everyone, dogs are not permitted inside Waypoint Church during our Sunday morning worship gatherings.

We recognise that some people experience fear or anxiety around dogs and that others have allergies or additional needs which can make their presence particularly difficult.

Assistance dogs are welcome.

Thank you for helping us make Waypoint Church a place where everyone can worship and feel at home.

15. Legal and Regulatory Framework

15.1 This Policy has been prepared having regard to the following legislation and guidance:

- a. **Equality Act 2010**, including the provisions relating to disability discrimination and reasonable adjustments;
- b. **Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), Assistance Dogs: A Guide for Businesses and Service Providers;** ([Equality and Human Rights Commission](#))
- c. the **Equality and Human Rights Commission Code of Practice for Services, Public Functions and Associations;** and
- d. other applicable health and safety, safeguarding and premises-management requirements.

15.2 The Equality Act 2010 imposes an anticipatory duty on service providers to make reasonable adjustments for disabled people. Government guidance confirms that this can include permitting assistance dogs where dogs would otherwise be prohibited. ([UK Parliament](#))

15.3 This Policy will be reviewed following any material change in relevant legislation, regulatory guidance or Waypoint Church's circumstances.

16. Policy Statement

16.1 Waypoint Church's position is therefore:

No ordinary dogs at Sunday morning worship gatherings. Assistance dogs welcome.

16.2 This Policy is intended to protect the wellbeing and participation of the whole church community while ensuring that people who require assistance dogs are welcomed and supported in accordance with the Equality Act 2010.

16.3 The Policy should be interpreted and applied in a manner consistent with Waypoint Church's Christian commitment to welcome, dignity, care and consideration for others.