Exeter Community Initiatives

Policy Name:	**Assistance Dogs Policy**
Last Review	**July 2026**
Next Review:	**July 2029**

The Trustees in adopting this policy fully understand their legal obligations and the importance of monitoring and implementing the policy within ECI.

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Exeter Community Initiatives
Assistance Dogs Policy

1. Purpose and Scope

Exeter Community Initiatives is committed to providing an inclusive and welcoming environment for customers, staff, and visitors. This policy explains our approach to assistance dogs across our premises, workshops, and events, and how we meet our duties under the Equality Act 2010.

Associated policies:

1 Equality and Diversity Policy

2. Assistance Dogs at our Premises and Workshops

- Only assistance/support dogs are permitted within ECI premises and during any workshops we deliver.
- Pets and non-assistance animals are not allowed, except where required by law.

An assistance dog is a dog that has been trained to support a disabled person with tasks related to their disability. This includes, but is not limited to, guide dogs, hearing dogs, and dogs trained to assist with physical or mental health conditions.

3. Emotional Support Dogs

It is not a legal requirement to allow emotional support dogs (in the same way as it is for assistance dogs). We will do our best to accommodate requests for support dogs but will review this on a case-by-case basis.

4. Identifying Assistance Dogs

Assistance dogs are often easily identifiable via a harness or lead which states "assistance dog" or "hearing dog" however it is not a legal requirement to identify or register an assistance dog, and assistance dog owners are not obliged to provide proof of this.

5. Events and Gatherings in Public Spaces

When ECI holds an event or gathering in public or third-party venues, we recognise that we cannot prevent the presence of dogs (or other animals) if the venue permits them.

In such cases, we will work with the venue and attendees to ensure a safe, respectful, and inclusive environment for all.

6. Responsibilities of Assistance Dog Owners

We kindly ask assistance dog handlers to:

- Keep their dog under control at all times.
- Ensure their dog is well behaved and does not pose a risk to others.
- Manage their dog's welfare, including toileting and rest needs.
- Take reasonable steps to prevent disruption to activities or workshops.

We understand that assistance dogs are working animals and should not be distracted whilst carrying out their role.

We reserve the right to ask a participant to leave our venue/activity if we feel their assistance dog poses a health & safety risk.

7. Our Responsibilities Under the Equality Act 2010

Under the Equality Act 2010, ECI has a legal duty to:

- Make reasonable adjustments to ensure disabled people are not placed at a substantial disadvantage.
- Allow access for assistance dogs to services and spaces where the public is normally admitted.
- Treat disabled customers and staff with dignity and respect.

We will not:

- Refuse service to someone because they are accompanied by an assistance dog.
- Charge extra fees or impose less favourable conditions due to the presence of an assistance dog.

Where issues arise (for example, severe allergies or health and safety concerns), we will aim to balance needs sensitively and reasonably, seeking practical solutions wherever possible.

8. Staff Awareness

All staff are expected to:

- Be aware of this policy.
- Understand that assistance dogs are not pets.
- Respond courteously and supportively to customers, visitors, or colleagues accompanied by an assistance dog.
- Advise customers/service users/volunteers that dogs may be present at ECI activities/venues and to refer to this policy for further information.

9. Questions or Concerns

If you have any questions about this policy or require adjustments to support your participation in ECI activities, please contact a member of staff in advance where possible.