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SOLICITORS & BARRISTERS

MORTGAGES & FINANCE

A note about cats and dogs

It is important to remember that as the owner of a companion animal you have responsibilities towards other members of the community as well as towards your pet.

The *Companion Animals Act* sets out these responsibilities, and gives Council the power to assist, and where necessary, enforce the law to ensure owners meet these responsibilities.

The Act is surprisingly complex, and large fines can be imposed on unwary animal owners who do not understand their obligations.

Initially, you are responsible for ensuring your animal does not harm any other person or animal. This means that you must be able to contain your dog on your property, and when you are in public with your dog you must keep it on a leash. Did you know that if your dog bites somebody else, you can be sued by the person bitten for damages, and prosecuted by Council?

Everybody knows and can recognise that dogs benefit greatly from a chance to run around freely. For this reason Councils must provide off-leash areas for the exercise of dogs. Contact your Council for a list of those areas if you are unsure.

As an owner of either a dog or a cat you must make sure that your animal does not cause any nuisance, whether by persistently making a noise, straying, interfering with other people's property, or otherwise. Again, if you fail to ensure your animal does not comply, you can personally face substantial penalties.

Both dogs and cats must be registered and wear some form of identification. It is an offence if they do not.

While most Councils do not use the *Companion Animals Act* to penalise dog or cat owners for minor or accidental breaches, the Act does grant them strong powers for dealing with animals and their owners who are causing a serious or ongoing problem.