

 West Lothian Council	Environmental Health		SUBJECT: Keeping Chickens at Home
		Food Safety/Food Hygiene	NUMBER: PH03
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	✓	Public Health	KEYWORDS:
STATUS: PUBLIC ADVICE		Pollution Control	CHICKENS
		Pest Control/Dog Warden	POULTRY

Information Sheet PH03 Keeping Chickens at Your Home

As with all pets, owning chickens can be a rewarding hobby and children especially enjoy watching them live and grow, not to mention the excitement of collecting freshly-laid eggs to eat.

West Lothian Council can give advice to poultry keepers to ensure that their pets are safe and healthy, and do not cause disturbance to their neighbours:

Things to Consider

Consider how many hens you would like and why you want them. A few would be great for keeping an urban garden clear of slugs and for providing eggs. If this is what you want to do, you will not need a cockerel. In a built up area it is far better not to have a cockerel because the noise they make is the most common cause of complaints.

If you wish to produce and raise chicks, one cockerel for every 10-12 hens is sufficient. If you have more than this they will argue among themselves by crowing more and sometimes fighting. This is not usually suitable to do in a built up area because of the noise. As an alternative, some breeders sell fertilised eggs that you can incubate at home until they hatch.

Restrictions on keeping chickens

Generally you can keep chickens provided it is not causing a noise, odour or pest nuisance for neighbours.

No planning consent is required for small numbers of chickens. However, if significant numbers are kept, planning consent may be needed.

The title deeds or tenancy agreement for your property may prevent you from keeping chickens.

Safety and Welfare of your Chickens

Housing: Ensure that the chickens have somewhere safe and secure and weatherproof to roost at night, and that the hen house is light-proof. This will keep them quiet until you let them out. They should be shut in every night and let out again in the morning, or they will start making noise at dawn.

Regularly remove and compost soiled bedding – it makes great mulch for the garden.

Food and Water: Your poultry should have continuous access to cool, clean water and an appropriate diet that is both plentiful and nutritional.

Health: It is your responsibility to monitor and maintain a flock free from distress, pain, injury and disease. Remember that you will need to arrange for someone to care for your birds every day, morning and night, if you are away from home.

Pest Control

Keep all food in dry rat-proof containers. Deal with any indications of rat activity quickly. Once they become established in an area, they become more difficult to get rid of.

Noise

Sometimes your neighbours might not like to hear the sounds of cockerels crowing, and may complain to you or the Council. If they do contact you, try to agree an acceptable solution.

If we receive complaints we will contact you, give advice to both parties and aim to achieve a resolution to the problem. However, where a noisy cockerel may be acceptable in the countryside, it may not be acceptable in a suburban garden.

Disease Control

All chickens are likely to carry some forms of food poisoning bacteria. This includes free range chickens. Care should always be taken to wash your hands after handling the birds, eggs or materials or equipment with which they may have come into contact. Young children, the ill and the elderly are more prone to disease and so particular care should be taken to remove the risk of illness.

Chickens, like all poultry are vulnerable to avian flu. You should make sure that your chicken house is big enough to take all birds indoors in the event of a bird flu outbreak. If not, some may have to be killed. For Current information and advice, see <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/avian-influenza-bird-flu>.

Anyone keeping more than 50 poultry must register. Anyone keeping less than 50 birds may register voluntarily so that they receive advice what to do in the vent of a bird flu outbreak. Information can be found online at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/poultry-registration>.

More Information

Useful websites include:

- www.domesticfowl.co.uk
- www.poultryclub.org