



Vulnerable Persons Policy

APPROVED

July 2009

LAST AMENDED

July 2009

NEXT FORMAL POLICY REVIEW REQUIRED

July 2011

FORMAL REVIEW OF POLICY BY

BOARD

NB: ALL POLICIES MUST BE REVIEWED BY RELEVANT MANAGER EACH YEAR

FREQUENCY OF FORMAL POLICY REVIEW

2 Years

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NOTES

Brief Policy Summary:

The purpose of the policy is to ensure that vulnerable people are treated equally and with respect. Their needs are identified, anticipated and met in areas of operation and service delivery.

1. Our Commitment

St Leger Homes is committed to providing suitable homes, maintaining independence, tackling social exclusion and empowering people to have a better quality of life. We believe that assessment of need and appropriate support are the key to sustaining an individual within their community.

2. Definition of Vulnerability

Our definition of vulnerability is: -

“An individual or household experiencing difficulties with everyday living on account of educational, health, employment, learning, language, behavioural, family, financial, social or other circumstances/issues - or any combination of these”

3. Examples of Vulnerability

We have a responsibility for vulnerable children and adults in the wider community. In terms of identifying vulnerable groups who access or who need to access our services, the following list gives possible examples of vulnerable groups. It is not intended to be exhaustive but merely illustrative.

- Older people
- Learning disability
- Mental health issues
- People with a history of homelessness and/or sleeping rough
- Persons threatened by domestic violence
- Persons threatened by hate crime or harassment
- Health problems/disability that affects quality of life (could be long/short term)
- Substance abuse, including drug and alcohol, treated or untreated
- Families with young children, where babies and children under school age are living on the premises
- Young people at risk or leaving care
- People coming out of a long term enclosed/supported environment

Our aim is to consider each case on its own merit. There can be no set criteria to define vulnerability and no standard response.

4. Expectations of Managers

We expect managers to

- Ensure a structured process in place to identify and respond to the needs of vulnerable customers in respect of their service areas

- Ensure that their staff are aware of the processes and understand how to operate them
- Monitor and take corrective action
- Identify and share good practice

5. Expectations of all staff

We expect all staff to

- Consider each case on its merits and tailor the service to meet customer needs
- Treat customers with respect
- Respect their dignity
- Focus on positive outcomes for each customer
- Refer customers requiring additional support
- Work with support agencies to meet individual customer needs

6. Delivery of the Policy in Service Areas

Customer Profile Questionnaires

In order to ensure that we provide good quality services, we are building up a detailed Profile of all our customers, tenants and applicants. To help us to achieve this we ask customers to complete a Customer Profile Questionnaire form which asks for a certain amount of personal information. The information provided by our customers will help us to ensure that we deliver services that people need and also improve the services that we currently offer. Completing a Customer Profile Questionnaire is optional for the customer. All information obtained will be used for the purposes it was collected and used in accordance with the Data Protection Act.

Customer Participation

We encourage and support all customers, including residents and leaseholders to be able to participate. Specific barriers to participation may include geographically remote housing or simply feelings of being 'different' due to race, disability, gender, age, religion or belief and sexual orientation. Along with the Customer Profile data we break down the barriers to participation, involvement and consultation.

Access to Services

We will ensure that there are a variety of ways to access all our services so that our most vulnerable customers are not disadvantaged. These include

- Disabled friendly accessible area housing offices (e.g. Disability Discrimination Act compliant, hearing loop facilities)
- Fax
- Typetalk / minicom
- Big Word Telephone Language Line
- Provision to provide literature in specified alternative language and formats
- Text Messaging
- Accessible websites for disabled users

Access to Your Home

Where we need to access a property to carry out repairs, improvements or safety checks we will take into account the needs of our vulnerable customers. Unless there is a reason for not doing so, such as investigating a tenancy issue or emergency situations, we will contact the customer beforehand to arrange a mutually convenient time to call and give the tenant the opportunity to arrange for a support officer/relative or friend to be available.

In a small number of cases where we find it difficult to gain access and it is necessary to do so we will remind the tenant of their tenancy conditions and request their co-operation to gain access. Where appropriate we will work with our partner agencies (including carer information from Customer Profile Questionnaire) to facilitate the visit. If access is not forthcoming we will, where required, in some cases take legal action to gain access, e.g. for Health and Safety reasons.

Partnership Working

We operate a Referral pathways service, signpost and work in Multi Agency Partnerships to provide our vulnerable customers with the relevant support. In addition we have trained support workers in partner agencies on Doncaster Housing bidding system for customers wanting to become tenants.

We work with a wide range of partners – Doncaster Council, the police, health related services being key examples all of whom help us to meet the needs of vulnerable persons in a wide variety of ways depending upon those customers needs and the nature of their vulnerability. There are other, more specific sources of support through – for example Supporting People, Mental Health Groups, CAB, CVS – however, these are only illustrative examples – officers will help individual customers access the support they need and will also work with relevant agencies in terms of planning services and planning how to deliver them.

Decent Homes

The decent homes team have dedicated Occupational Therapists to assess special needs of our vulnerable tenants in relation to minor bathing related issues. Our team work closely with the council's Aids and Adaptations team and the Adult Contact team within Social Services to ensure that all tenants' needs are met.

Whilst construction works are being carried out, we also provide a respite facility for tenants. This could be daytime or overnight, depending on assessed need.

Repairs & Maintenance

Our contact centre agents are trained to prioritise repairs taking into account individual's circumstances because vulnerability can impact on customers in different ways.

Where it is identified that a repair is impacting directly on the customer's health, well being or security we always try to work flexibly and in some circumstances we may carry out the repair sooner. We may also, in some instances, waiver the charge for vulnerability reasons.

Customers can access the repairs service either as described in the Access to Services section or via the following specific methods:-

- A 24 hour, 365 days a year, freephone (0800) repairs service;
- On line forms or the repairs on line diagnostic tool;
- Email to tenantrepairs@stlegerhomes.co.uk;

Insurance Claims

The Insurance Investigation team ensures that any vulnerable customers making a potential claim against Doncaster Council's insurance policy are adequately supported through what could be a traumatic and stressful period. We will assess customer's needs and situation, and wherever possible deal with any claim in such a way as to cause the minimum stress and discomfort.

Customer Services

Officers take into account customer's support needs when making contact. Our Tenancy Verifications are completed as a rolling program. Part of this process involves identifying needs of the household.

We make referrals to appropriate support services where a need is identified for individuals or household experiencing difficulties with everyday living.

We work in partnership with the Police and Council on various initiatives such as:-

- Tackling Hate Crime as per our Hate crime Policy
- Deliver enhanced security to customers by working with the police
- Protecting customers suffering Domestic Violence

Homechoice

Homechoice administers the councils allocations policy. The policy works on a prioritised banding system which takes into account vulnerability issues. There is a Housing Assessment Panel which can prioritise applicants outside of the banding system e.g. applicants who need to be rehoused due to hate crime or domestic violence.

The Homechoice team obtain customer profile information at the point of registration and use the information to tailor services for example, if a customer is unable to bid there is the facility for bids to be made on their behalf. The housing register is reviewed on an annual rolling program. If a response is not received from the applicant it is cancelled, but if the Customer Profile Data identifies that there may be a reason relating to vulnerability, further enquiries will be made.

Separate arrangements are made in relation to disability where an accessible housing register is operated through Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council – the accessible housing register. We work closely with DMBC to monitor and to assist with the service with a view to providing a speedier, delay free service – for example, we have provided temporary resource to assist with “low level” medical cases.

Financial & Welfare Support advice

Arrangements for customers to pay off arrears are made taking into account their ability to pay and their personal and financial circumstances. We take into account customers diverse needs when making home visits. Customers can get advice from our dedicated financial advice website, www.SLHDMoneywise.co.uk and telephone support from a St Leger Homes Benefits and Welfare advisor.

Additionally, we offer customers the opportunity to seek independent, impartial advice if they require assistance with benefit and debt issues through fully/partial funded posts at Citizens Advice Bureau and South Yorkshire Credit Union.

Business Planning – Performance and Improvement team

Our Compliance Officer will undertake timetabled, sample case studies in order to ensure the policy is being complied with, across every directorate and service.

The Performance team will assist monitoring through Customer Satisfaction surveys, Mystery Shopper surveys, analysis of customer complaints and reality checking. In order to find out the most accurate performance information, we will be looking to develop our current performance indicators and break them down into more specific fields.

Through our Customer Care Compliments, Comments and Complaints system we aim to identify our vulnerable customers and then take reasonable steps to ensure that they receive the appropriate advice, help and support. We will aim to accommodate and make our services accessible to everyone; for example home visits or alternative methods of communication where necessary.

Falsely Declaring Vulnerability

A small number of customers may either falsely declare vulnerability or exaggerate their vulnerability in order to receive services that either would not otherwise be provided or would be provided at a different level/in a different time frame. Should this occur, St Leger Homes would consider what action, in response, would be appropriate - for example in the case of the repairs service a recharge may be considered.

7. Monitoring and Review

The Business Planning Team will coordinate satisfaction and performance information as described earlier in this policy - this information will inform the monitoring and review of the policy.

In addition to statistical monitoring, further monitoring will be undertaken through casework reports/checks of casefiles and accuracy checks of customer information and the use made of that information.

In addition the performance and satisfaction will be reported to management meetings and Board/Committee meetings.

The policy will subject to a formal review at least every two years. Future reviews of the policy will be undertaken by the St Leger Homes of Doncaster Equality and Diversity Steering Group.

8. Associated Policies

This policy should be read in conjunction with other policies.

9. Guidance to Managers and Staff

The following specific information leaflets are available on the company intranet system for guidance.

- Elderly Abuse Leaflet
- Mental Health Leaflet
- Gypsy & Traveller
- Asylum Seekers
- Hate Crime
- Domestic Violence
- Sanctuary Scheme

10., Glossary of Terms

Disability Discrimination Act (DDA)

This act is the main anti-discrimination legislation for disabled people. It came into being in 1995 and amended in 2005. It provides rights for disabled people in the areas of Employment, access to goods, services and transport.

Disabled person

A disabled person is an individual who has an impairment and whose experiences are continually affected by contemporary social, educational, environmental or economic trends. These trends take little or no account of her/his 'rights' as a person to reach her/his maximum potential. Consequently, the individual is unable to participate fully in society. This view of disabled people is known as the Social Model of Disability. In other words, Society disables those people with impairment, not the condition.

Discrimination

This term is used here in the sense of unfair discrimination i.e. using information, which is unfair, or irrelevant to influence a decision on the way someone is treated.

Domestic Abuse/Violence

Domestic Abuse/violence is any abuse that takes place in a personal or family relationship. It can happen to anyone, and in all kinds of relationships - heterosexual, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT). People suffer domestic abuse/violence regardless of their social group, class, age, race, disability, sexual orientation or lifestyle.

Monitoring

The term is used here to refer to the process of collecting information to use in evaluating services.

Mystery Shopping

The use of employees or agents to visit a store or use a service anonymously and assess its quality. Mystery shopping is used to assess such factors as the quality of customer service, including general and technical efficiency, and friendliness of staff, layout, and appearance of the premises, and quality and variety of goods or services on offer.

Performance Indicator

Key Performance Indicators are quantifiable measurements, agreed to beforehand, that reflect the critical success factors of an organisation. They will differ depending on the organisation. A Customer Service Department may have as one of its Key Performance Indicators, in line with overall company KPIs, percentage of customer calls answered in the first minute. A Key Performance Indicator for a social service organisation might be number of clients assisted during the year.

Positive action

This is a term used here to refer to the ways in which an organisation will lawfully seek to overcome the effects of past discrimination against disadvantaged groups, in the provision of services and in the employment of staff.

Recharge

Circumstances sometimes arise when it is necessary to charge existing tenants, leaseholders, and also former tenants, for repairs carried out to properties managed by ourselves.

Respite

St Leger Homes of Doncaster are currently carrying out Decency works to their housing stock across the borough. However, vulnerable tenants may be unable to cope with the upheaval when their property is due to have remedial works carried out as part of this rolling programme. The Decency Project Manager will assess each individual situation, and decide whether to offer temporary Respite accommodation to tenants who are considered to need extra support and assistance while the programme of works is carried out to their home.

Service delivery

The term used here to refer to all the ways in which an organisation provides services both directly e.g. designing and maintaining roads, running schools, providing housing, collecting and disposing of rubbish, operating libraries and sports centres, running homes for elderly people etc; and indirectly e.g. through personnel, legal and financial administration support.

Specific Fields

Performance Indicators can be broken down into more specific fields, to give detailed information on areas that directly affect the business, such as Rent Arrears, Average number of Days taken to Re-let a Property and Number of Repairs undertaken.

Tenancy Verification

Tenancy Verification visits to every property on a rolling 3-year programme. During the courtesy call, the Estate Officer will check Tenancy details, ensure that the property is in a reasonable state of repair, and deal with any queries from the tenant.

Waiver a Charge

Circumstances sometimes arise when it is necessary to charge existing tenants, leaseholders, and also former tenants, for repairs carried out to properties managed by ourselves. However, St Leger Homes Business Managers use their discretion to waive the charge for reasons of vulnerability or other sensitive issues such as bereavement with no next of kin or estate.