

# **PEOPLE FOCUSED HOUSING SERVICES POLICY**

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## **1.0 Scope**

The Housing Service should consider this policy when working with all customers, including housing applicants, lifeline customers, tenants and leaseholders. The term customers will be used throughout the policy, except where support is specific to a particular group. For example, when an adjustment is only relevant for tenants.

## **2.0 Purpose**

This policy outlines how the Housing Service will adapt services to those who require information, support or a service in a different way.

## **3.0 Aims and Objectives**

The aims of this policy are to ensure the Housing Service:

- Request and manage up to date customer data which identifies those who require additional support and those who may need it in the future
- Encourage customers to share information on how services can be adapted to meet their needs, due to vulnerability, disability or neurodiversity
- Provide tailored services to all customers who require it
- Develop effective partnerships with support agencies
- Provide appropriate training to employees

It is not possible to identify every scenario where a customer may require support. However, the policy will provide a framework for employees to assist them.

## **4.0 Regulatory Code and Legal Framework**

The Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002) lists a number of categories under which customers could be classed as vulnerable:

- People with a recent history of homelessness, rough sleepers, refugees and those with no experience of independent living
- Those with substance misuse problems. e.g. alcohol or drugs
- People in receipt of, or entitled to state retirement pension
- Ex-offenders
- Those at risk of domestic abuse
- People with learning difficulties
- Those with serious long term, or terminal, illness
- Young people at risk, including those leaving care as well as teenage parents
- Those people with a mental, physical or sensory disability who are in receipt of a state benefit, or are entitled to such a benefit, as a result of that disability
- Others with a disability which has an impact upon the performance of normal daily living tasks
- People with a child under 12 months old in the household.

It is acknowledged that although important legislation the categories included in the Housing Act 1996 are not exhaustive list. This policy considers all customers that

require additional support, not just those who may consider themselves vulnerable or are included in legislation.

Through the Equality Act 2010 the Council as a landlord has a duty 'to make reasonable adjustments'. This includes changing a policy or practice (including the terms of the tenancy agreement) and providing extra aids or services.

Through the Care Act 2014 the Council has a duty to promote the wellbeing of people with care and support needs.

The Council will adopt the existing legal and regulatory framework whilst also acknowledging that vulnerability is complex and can be temporary, periodic, recurring or on-going.

## **5.0 Policy Outline**

### **5.1 Identification of a customer who requires additional support**

The Council must recognise when someone may require additional support. This can be achieved by considering all the data available and by speaking to the customer. Whilst many customers will be comfortable discussing the support they require, the Council is aware that some customers may not. Officers will always ensure that conversations are handled as sensitively as possible. The Council will consider making an adjustment based on the information provided by the customer. A diagnosis or supporting information is not required for additional support to be offered.

Information contained in application forms is the Council's first opportunity to identify any additional needs. Officers will consider information that has been directly provided by the customer. For example, details of a disability, that they have a young child or are in receipt of a disability benefit. Officers will also consider information that indicates that there may be additional needs. For example, if a form has been poorly completed or questions misunderstood. If the Officer is unclear what additional assistance may be required or if there is a need, they will contact the customer to discuss this.

An application form may also state that a customer has a support worker or involvement with other agencies. Where appropriate, Officers will make contact with other agencies to obtain additional information regarding support needs.

On some occasions, additional needs may not be identified at application stage. This may be because the customer did not feel comfortable disclosing the information, they did not feel that it was relevant, or did not provide the information due to their additional need. When the customer is met for the first time, the Officer should seek to identify any additional support needs, wherever possible.

### **5.2 Changes in support**

Support needs can change over time. Officers will continue to consider if the customer they are working with now requires additional support. For example, tenants who are now elderly, have had a child or developed a medical condition.

The support that customers require can also change depending on their circumstances. For example, someone who was a joint tenant may not have required additional support from the Housing Service as they may have received support from other household members, but they may require additional support if they no longer live with others.

In Independent Living accommodation, all tenants have an I-Plan completed by their Independent Living Co-ordinator every 6 months. This identifies areas where the tenant may require support to enable them to stay independent in their home. The I-plan also identifies any care needs, and ensures that appropriate referrals are made.

Following the start of a tenancy, all tenants receive new tenant visits, at months 1, 4 and 7. These visits are an opportunity to consider whether all relevant additional needs have been considered and to discuss with the tenant if the way that the service is being delivered is meeting their needs.

## **5.2 Recording support needs**

Any support needs identified should be recorded on the appropriate systems. For applicants, this is the HomeChoice system. For Lifeline customers, this is the Lifeline database. For tenants and leaseholders, this is the Housing Management System.

When an applicant becomes a tenant, or a tenant becomes a Lifeline customer, Officers must ensure that information is shared between relevant systems.

Information held will be kept up to date and reviewed regularly to ensure that it is still relevant.

## **5.3 Designing appropriate services**

The Council is committed to adapting services where required. However, ideally services should be designed to be accessible to as many people as possible without changes to the service being required. The Council will consider this when designing services. Examples include (not an exhaustive list):

- Producing easy to read summaries of complex information and policies
- Providing information for Lifeline and Independent Living tenants in large print, as the majority of people who use these services are elderly
- Offering a Garden Maintenance Scheme for those unable to maintain their own gardens
- Providing a higher level of contact for Independent Living customers than General Needs customers
- Accepting information in a variety of formats
- If forms are required, offering face to face and telephone appointments to assist with completion

### **5.3 Adapting services**

The Council will tailor its existing services to meet the needs of customers as required, where it is reasonable and proportionate to do so. Examples include (not an exhaustive list):

- Providing information in different formats, languages and text sizes
- Contacting tenants in the way that they request, rather than as standard
- Corresponding in a particular way or format to meet the request of a person who is Neurodiverse
- Providing a flexible repairs service, increasing priority for work when required
- Waiving a recharge where a tenant's vulnerability prevents them from adhering to current policy

### **5.4 Referrals to in-house teams**

It may be appropriate to make a referral for additional support from either a Tenancy Sustainment Officer or Financial Inclusion Officer. These Officers work to help tenants maintain their tenancies, both through direct support, including home visits, and by making appropriate referrals to other external agencies. These Officers can also assist tenants to access other services. For example, assist the tenant to report Repairs and be present for Repairs appointments if required.

### **5.5 Partnership Working**

There will be occasions when a customer's complex needs are best met by adopting a partnership approach. The Council will build strong relationships with a variety of support agencies to effectively support the customer. Referrals will be made to external agencies with the consent of the customer and we will participate in case conferencing and the Broxtowe Complex Case Panel to ensure that appropriate support is available.

### **5.6 Involvement with Housing Services**

It is important that all customers have the opportunity to be involved in developing and improving Housing Services. The Council will offer a wide range of ways to get involved, including in person and online. If the ways currently offered do not meet the needs of a customer, we will work with them to provide an alternative that is appropriate.

### **5.7 Training**

It is important that employees have the relevant skills and knowledge to be able to identify needs and provide appropriate support. Employees will receive training relevant to their roles. This training will be reviewed to ensure that the team's knowledge and skills are kept up to date.

### **6.0 Related Policies, Procedures and Guidelines**

This policy should be read in conjunction with the:

- Anti-Social Behaviour Policy
- Equality and Diversity Policy
- Hoarding Protocol
- Safeguarding Adults Policy
- Safeguarding Children Policy
- Managing Abusive, Persistent and/or Vexatious Customers Policy
- Hoarding Protocol
- Hate Crime Policy
- Aids and Adaptations Policy

## **7.0 Review**

This policy will be reviewed every three years. It is not expected that there will be changes to regulation or legislation which will have an impact on the need to review this policy sooner.

## **8.0 Document History and Approval**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Version</b>	<b>Committee Name</b>
3/6/2025	1.0	Cabinet