



Policy Outline

VULNERABILITY POLICY

OVERALL PURPOSE

West North West homes appreciates that identification of vulnerability can be difficult as vulnerable people often demonstrate quite rational and normal behaviour with the characteristics being fragmented, obscure and particular to individuals. Identification of a vulnerable person can occur at any time during the course of an individual's contact with WNWhL and staff should ensure that they use any contact as a way by which potential vulnerability can be identified.

INTRODUCTION

WNWhL define a vulnerable adult as someone who is 16 years of age and over and:

- Is or may be in need of community care services by reason of mental or other disability, age or illness; and who;
- Is or may be unable to take care of themselves, or unable to protect themselves against significant harm or exploitation.

Those who might be potentially vulnerable therefore include but not limited to:

- The elderly
- People with a physical or sensory disability
- People with a learning disability
- People with mental health issues
- The seriously ill
- The recently bereaved
- Single parent families
- Pregnant women (particularly teenagers)
- People suffering domestic abuse or violence
- People suffering hate crime
- People not in employment
- People who are considered to be financially excluded
- Those who have difficulty in understanding, speaking or reading English
- Offenders and people at risk of offending
- People with HIV or AIDS
- Young people leaving care
- People with alcohol problems
- People with drug problems
- Rough Sleepers

PERFORMANCE MEASURES

We will monitor the implementation and delivery of services through this policy by:

- Number of completed Support Plans
- Number of New Tenancy Visits completed with S/P
- Number of Quarterly Reviews completed
- Number of Tenancies become Secure
- Customer Satisfaction of Service Delivery
- Number of Complaints Received
- % responded to within timescales
- Performance Management Framework with SMART targets which is reported monthly to SMT and Board

Vulnerability Policy

1. Statement of Intent

- 1.1 WNWhL has developed a number of processes throughout the business which considers the needs of vulnerable people.
- 1.2 To facilitate this process WNWhL has developed and introduced throughout its business process a “Support Assessment” which prompts a series of questions and subject areas aimed at being able to identify and determine the extent of vulnerability. If a number of triggers are activated a referral for housing support will be made.
- 1.3 The purpose of identifying potential vulnerability is to ensure that the service provided is wherever possible tailored to meet the needs of the individual. Where WNWhL does not directly provide a service, identifying vulnerability can prompt staff to develop partnerships and sign post customers to relevant external agencies that can provide support.

2.0 Outline of Service

- 2.1 WNWhL has access to a great deal of information through direct and indirect contact with individual. Whilst sensitivity and discretion are obviously important in protecting the privacy of individuals it is essential that data sharing amongst different sections to the business and partners is used to maximum effect to ensure that vulnerable customers are known and identified. WNWhL enables this to happen through various information sharing protocols and by asking our customers if we are able to share the data.
- 2.2 The Support Assessment will enable the business to assess at various stages, whether a customer needs support even at the stage before a customer becomes a tenant. Staff will utilise these opportunities to gain as much information as possible about the prospective tenant and determine if and what support will be required in so doing.

In particular WNWhL will ensure:

- All applications for housing are examined prior to processing to detect any signs that may contribute to vulnerability
- Any cases will be immediately referred to both our Empty Homes Team and our Tenancy Management Support Team
- Work with the various housing office and their teams to maximise support and managing all aspects of the tenancy
- Work with the Specialised Support providers to ensure vulnerability needs are met
- Customer Service Officers (CSO's) will also assess potential vulnerability at pre-tenancy interviews
- All tenancy visits and tenancy audits will be used to establish whether additional support is required to maintain a tenancy
- Ensure that our partners, especially our contractors, inform us of any vulnerability support needs
- Capture and record all relevant details on our various computer systems.
- Work closely with our Tenant Enforcement Team to address any issues of ASB relating to vulnerability
- Work closely with our Environmental Team to address any support needs for rough sleepers
- Work closely with our Accounts Team to pick up on rent arrears relating to vulnerability
- Any enquiry into a breach of tenancy will examine vulnerability
- Possession will only be used as a last resort where all other remedies have been exhausted
- Work within the principles of the Mental Capacity Act 2005

3.0 Specific Needs

3.1 Support for Vulnerable Customers

- 3.1.1 The provision of support may be long term to enable anyone with particular needs to maintain their tenancy. The support may also be time limited to enable an individual to alter their lifestyle and gain the skills, motivation and confidence to move onto greater independence.
- 3.1.2 Level of support will be determined following an assessment of individual's circumstances captured via the "Support Assessment" and systems updated to alert staff enabling them to use the information held in a pro-active manner when the tenant is in contact or when a tenancy displays signs of entering difficulties e.g. missed rent payments.
- 3.1.3 Individual customers not will require the same level of support and very often the provision, such as how to contact their Housing Manager and where they can go to receive advice and guidance will be sufficient.
- 3.1.4 Where a customer requires a greater level of support, Staff will undertake assessment of the risks involved and where necessary be prepared to offer extra support and assistance. Regular contact with the tenant whether there are difficulties with the tenant or not will create a sense of trust and confidence.

3.1.5 In appropriate cases the assessment will lead to a referral for support to other agencies and it is crucial that any referral is pursued to an outcome with the roles of anyone who will provide assistance e.g. tenancy sustainment, social workers, care workers family members or any other support organisation clearly defined. This will be achieved through our Support Provider Forums

3.2 Tenancy Management Action

3.2.1 Vulnerability should not be seen as an excuse for breaching tenancy conditions and action will have to be taken where they occur particularly if a rent account falls into arrears or the tenant is causing nuisance. However staff will be required to show sensitivity and have expended all efforts to reach a remedy prior to commencing any possession proceedings. All pre-court protocols will be met and evidence recorded that all preventative measures to prevent legal action have been taken.

3.2.2 The role of support agencies is not to be underestimated and a case conference will be convened in relevant circumstances, particularly where there is a corporate implication, with action plans produced with relevant parties having clear lines of accountability and understanding of roles.

3.2.3 Relying purely on standard procedures and letters, no matter how effective may not be sufficient and we will use a variety of methods in an attempt to resolve tenancy breaches before situations escalate and any debts become too onerous and unmanageable.

- Involvement of outside agencies, e.g. CAB, Victim Support, Benefits Agency,
- Support Agencies
- ASBU
- Mediation Services
- Interpreter Services
- Social Services
- Health Services

3.3.4 Whilst letters have a role to play, particularly in confirming and reinforcing our action and intentions, customers may feel more vulnerable by the very nature of not being able to read or comprehend their content. Therefore a concerted effort to supplement written communication with a telephone call or visit is likely to remove some of the anxiety a letter may cause.

3.3.5 If agreements cannot be reached WNWH will be faced with the dilemma of seeking a legal remedy. It is at this stage that the merits and actions taken will possibly be exposed to the public area through the court. Clearly it is vital for staff to examine cases and be confident that they are able to demonstrate that every effort has been made to reach an agreement.

4.0 Consultation

4.1 West North West homes Leeds will seek the views of customers on this policy at least annually in a variety of different ways through our Customer Involvement mechanisms.

5.0 Implementation

- 5.1 It is the responsibility of all West North West Homes Leeds' Managers and staff to ensure that their work is carried out in line with this policy and procedures relating to it.
- 5.2 Members of West North West Homes Leeds Board, the Chief Executive and Heads Of Services are responsible for developing this policy and ensuring that this policy is implemented and monitored effectively.
- 5.3 All our staff will be trained in Customer Service at induction and at regular intervals to ensure they are aware of the requirements of this policy.
- 5.4 Through our Human Resources Section, WNWHL will ensure that all our staff receive training on vulnerability on a regular basis.
- 5.5 The training will be compulsory for those members of staff who work most closely with our customers e.g. front line staff.
- 5.6 The Tenancy Support Management Team will also provide information to our Human resources and Cohesion and Diversity Team on the development needs of our staff on a regular basis.

6.0 Monitoring

- 6.1 WNWHL will analyse vulnerability and provide regular reports to the KLOE Board along with appropriate SMT members, Sub committees and our Board.
- 6.2 Our customer's views are fundamental to our policy. We will engage in customer research, asking for feedback on standards and costs. Through this, We will feed ideas forward and achieve continuous improvement and Value for Money.

7.0 Review

- 7.1 In preparation for delivering this policy during 2009 West North West homes Leeds has reviewed and taken into account new or emerging government legislation and government and council policies.

As a result, this policy now fully reflects, and is inclusive of the issues arising from those policies and legislation, and considers the impacts arising.

- 7.2 Review date September 2010

8.0 Legislation

- 8.1 New or emerging legislation and new policy for 2009 include:

- Housing Act 2004
- Mental Capacity Act 2005
- Data Protection Act 1998
- Disability Discrimination Act 1995 & amendments 2005

- Equality Act 2006
- Domestic Violence and Abuse Policy
- Anti – Social Behaviour Policy
- Empty Homes and Allocation Policy
- Sheltered Support Policy
- Tenant Support Policy
- Customer Care Policy
- Complaints/Compliments Policy

