

# Housing Services Vulnerability Policy

Department	Housing Services
Responsible Person	Director of Housing
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## **1. Policy Objective**

- 1.1 The London Borough of Barking and Dagenham (the Council) are committed to ensuring that services are accessible and responsive to the needs of vulnerable tenants. Where appropriate, reasonable adjustments will be made to remove barriers and support individuals in accessing services equitably. This policy outlines the Council's commitment to ensuring that its tenants who experience one or more of a range of vulnerabilities are treated with compassion and respect.
- 1.2 As a social landlord that owns and manages circa 16,000 Council homes, including general needs properties and Sheltered Housing Schemes for older tenants, the Council recognises its duty to meet the specific needs of vulnerable individuals, ensuring they receive appropriate support and adjustments.
- 1.3 The Council aims to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to access and benefit from its services but realises that for some service users who are vulnerable, barriers may exist which may prevent participation.
- 1.4 This policy applies to those services operated by the Council, specifically those situated in the Housing, Environment and Communities Directorate.

## **2. Purpose and Scope**

- 2.1 This policy applies to all staff and services within Housing, as well as contractors, agencies, and partners who work with the department. It covers all aspects of housing services, including but not limited to, tenancy management, allocations, rents safety and compliance and repairs.
- 2.2 The Council has a duty under the Equality Act 2010 to "*advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it*". Alongside this, as both a Local Authority and a social housing provider, the Council recognises that tenants can be vulnerable for reasons other than the characteristics protected under the equalities legislation. This policy sets out both how the Council defines vulnerability and how it aims to respond to those tenants' needs.

## **3. Policy**

- 3.1 This policy applies to all tenants particularly those affected by factors such as bereavement, disability, language barriers, mental health challenges, or other circumstances that may hinder their ability to access housing services. It also includes those whose vulnerability is manifest in behaviours which are of concern to the Council as a landlord, for example hoarding or refusing access.

3.2 The Council recognises that vulnerability is not a fixed state and that tenants may move in and out of vulnerability due to life events, health changes, or other circumstances.

### 3.3 **Definition**

The Council defines vulnerability in relation to its services as:

*characteristics that a tenant or household member possesses, either permanently or temporarily, that may result in them requiring care, support or changes to our standard procedures when interacting with LBBD as their landlord. For example, co-ordinating a visit for those times when the tenant can arrange for someone to assist in opening the door to allow a gas safety check or implementing a personal evacuation plan to assist exiting a high-rise property in an emergency. These characteristics may require reasonable adjustments that are appropriate to actively prevent harm or distress. These can include recognised physical disabilities or mental health issues, but will also include temporary situations, such as pregnancy or undergoing treatment for cancer.*

Examples of specific vulnerabilities include, but are not limited to:

- Age (e.g., elderly, or young individuals)
- Physical or mental health conditions
- Disabilities (physical, sensory, cognitive)
- Learning disability and low levels of literacy
- Experiencing domestic abuse or violence
- Drug or alcohol dependency
- Financial difficulties or poverty
- Bereavement
- Discrimination
- Social isolation
- Hoarding
- Self-neglect

3.3.1 This policy not only sets out the Council's duties under legislation but also those actions and interventions it wants to put in place as a proactive local authority, and a social landlord, to ensure that it achieves fair and equitable outcomes for all its tenants.

3.3.2 The Council includes in this definition, people who receive or need additional care and support services. The Council recognises that not everyone who has a disability is vulnerable under the definition of this policy. The Council also recognises that vulnerability is not always permanent, and that a person's needs may change over time.

### 3.4 Identification of Vulnerability

- **Self-Identification:** Tenants using the Council's services are encouraged to disclose any vulnerabilities they may have which will be recorded on the Council's Housing Services database(s)
- **Concerns raised by neighbours, family members or person acting on the tenant's behalf.**
- **Referrals from other services:** Other Council services, including partnership agencies or external organisations such as the London Fire Brigade or the NHS may refer individuals, based on their vulnerabilities, to Housing services.
- **Assessment Process:** While delivering its services as a landlord, the council may undertake its own assessments to identify any immediate or long-term support needs. This includes telephone interviews, home visits (where appropriate), and tenancy agreement sign-ups. In addition, the council will make safeguarding referrals or raise a cause for concern where appropriate.

### 3.5 Recording Vulnerability

3.5.1 When vulnerability is identified, either by the individual or through contact with staff, it is essential to:

- **Document Vulnerability Information:** The Council will collect and store all relevant vulnerability information in accordance with UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018, as necessary to support an individual's specific needs.
- **Vulnerability 'flags':** The Council will hold these against any individuals that have been identified as vulnerable. These will be held on the Council's Housing systems and will enable the Council to shape the services it provides, for example prioritising visits to vulnerable tenants who have reported damp and mould issues.
- **Consent:** Before recording personal details related to vulnerability, consent will be obtained from the individual by staff, unless there are safeguarding concerns that require information to be shared without consent. The individual will always be informed of how their information will be used and who it will be shared with.

### 3.6 Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion:

3.6.1 Actions in relation to vulnerabilities, will always be both proportionate and appropriate to the individual's needs. The Council will not discriminate because of any of the Protected Characteristics of disability, age, gender reassignment, gender, sexual orientation, race, religion, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy, and maternity.

3.6.2 While the Council do not necessarily define all people with a protected characteristic as 'vulnerable' for the purposes of this policy, it will give due consideration to any protected characteristics while providing housing and landlord services to avoid any inadvertent discrimination.

### **3.7 Reasonable Adjustments**

3.7.1 The Council will ensure equal access to services and make reasonable adjustments for those with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010.

3.7.2 The Council have a duty to all its tenants to ensure that where possible when it applies its policies, it makes fair and suitable adjustments in consideration of existing vulnerabilities.

3.7.3 A reasonable adjustment can include adaptations to buildings, such as to a step or doorway or providing additional utilities such as heating, ventilation or installing window restrictors. It can also include temporarily moving the tenant to an alternative property, or room, whilst works are undertaken.

3.7.4 A reasonable adjustment can also be a change to the way the Council delivers its service, such as;

- Providing information in accessible formats, such as easy-read documents, large print, Braille, audio recordings, or coloured paper
- Allowing additional time for tenants to respond to communications or participate in consultations, where legally permissible
- Using the tenant's preferred method of communication (e.g. email, post, telephone)
- Facilitating communication through interpreters, advocates, or intermediaries where needed
- Allowing extra time for tenants to answer the door during home visits
- Carrying out meetings with tenants at accessible venues and/or online
- In line with the Mental Capacity Act 2005, the Council will liaise with those who have legal authority to act on behalf of its tenants who lack capacity.

3.7.5 As well as making reasonable adjustments to its own services as above, when dealing with vulnerable tenants the Council will seek to link them to other agencies and organisations that can provide support based on their vulnerability. For example, the Council may, with a tenants' consent, signpost them to a charity or service that offers support specifically for people experiencing social isolation.

- 3.7.6 There may be times where the Council, as a responsible social landlord, have to take enforcement action against vulnerable tenants to protect the well-being and safety of others. However, it will endeavour even when taking such action to ensure that the well-being of the vulnerable tenant is maintained as far as possible.
- 3.7.7 In relation to property maintenance, where the Council know a tenant is vulnerable, and it plans to deliver major works to the home or block in which they live, the Council will review the impact of these works on a case-by-case basis. Where necessary the Council will undertake a further assessment, with the tenant, prior to works commencing, to agree if any further adjustments would be required to how the Council intend to deliver these works.

### **3.8 Public Sector Equalities Duty (PSED)**

- 3.8.1 The public sector equality duty (PSED) is a legal requirement for public authorities and organisations carrying out public functions.
- 3.8.2 As a local authority, the Council has a duty to carry out this requirement. In line with this Section 149 of the Public Sector Equality Duty states:
- (1) A public body must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:
- a. eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act.
  - b. advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
  - c. foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- 3.8.3 The Public Sector Equality Duty is a duty on the Council, and the responsibility cannot be delegated to a contractor/service provider and is a continuing duty.

## **4. Implementation and Performance**

- 4.1 All officers within Housing will be responsible for implementing this policy. This will be ensured by continuing training in best practices for supporting vulnerable tenants.
- 4.2 The effectiveness of this policy will be regularly reviewed to ensure that it continues to meet the needs of vulnerable tenants and complies with relevant legislation and best practices.
- 4.3 Vulnerable tenants will be given the opportunity to provide feedback on the services they have received through various engagement methods, including

becoming a tenant representative or engaging in surveys and workshops. This feedback will be used to continuously improve service delivery.

## **5. Equality Impact**

- 5.1 Applying this policy consistently and sensitively will ensure that all tenants and their household members in Council owned homes who have protected characteristics and/or are deemed vulnerable for other reasons receive services that are based on a recognition of their vulnerability. The Council will make all appropriate adjustments to the services they receive in order to mitigate any potential negative impacts on them and to ensure they receive fair and equal treatment from the Council as their landlord.