

VULNERABILITY POLICY

Cabinet Member Cllr Ray Stanley
Responsible Officer Claire Fry, Housing Services Manager

Reason for Report: To explain the rationale for a new policy for the Housing Service relating to identifying and supporting vulnerable tenants and to seek the adoption of this.

RECOMMENDATION(S): That Cabinet recommends the adoption of the Housing Service Vulnerability Policy.

Relationship to Corporate Plan: The Council must run the Housing Service efficiently and effectively in accordance with legislative requirements and the provisions of the regulatory framework. The Council must also consider the impact of an aging population and help people retain their independence and remain in their own home.

Financial Implications: Income from the lifeline alarm service and Handyperson Scheme are accounted for within the Housing Revenue Account and supports housing expenditure.

Legal Implications: Having a clearly defined policy ensures consistency of approach.

Risk Assessment: Failure to provide housing management staff with the appropriate policies could result in a less consistent and effective service.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 The Council is committed to improving the Housing Service and generating additional income. The implementation of a new Vulnerability Policy will provide guidance on identifying and supporting vulnerable tenants to help them to sustain their tenancy and promote independence.

1.2 Tenants Together approved the draft Vulnerability Policy at their meeting on 2 March 2017.

1.4 Cabinet is asked to consider the new policy and to agree the adoption of it.

2.0 Overview of policy

2.1 The policy provides a framework for staff which sets out the Council's approach to identifying and supporting vulnerable tenants. It highlights the different vulnerabilities that people face and explains some of the services available to support them.

- 2.2 The policy explains the different ways a person's vulnerability can be brought to the attention of the Council. For example, it may be highlighted through their Devon Home Choice application, service requests, local knowledge obtained or information supplied by external agencies, such as health, education or probation.
- 2.3 The different factors that increases vulnerability are highlighted in the policy, for example, a medical condition affecting mental or physical health, having a learning disability, language barriers where English is not a tenant's first language or being a victim of domestic abuse.
- 2.4 There are other risk factors associated with a person developing mental health difficulties and these have been explained in the policy. This could be linked to biological factors caused by genetics or hormone imbalance, social factors such as poverty deprivation, unemployment or isolation and psychological factors which refer to the kind of person someone is and how they cope with life demands.
- 2.5 It is recognised that vulnerability can be experienced for short periods of time or on a long term basis. Officers of the Council, where available, will provide assistance to support the tenant in sustaining their tenancy or will make a referral to an external agency for advice and support.
- 2.6 Examples of support provided by the Council includes: providing aids and adaptations to promote independent living, providing advice on housing matters and benefits, making referrals for debt and financial advice or liaising with other external agencies with specialist knowledge and services.
- 2.7 It is important that when it is brought to the Council's attention that someone has a vulnerability, that this is recorded. Therefore a clause has been introduced which states that information will be stored on the Council's housing management system so it can be referred to when offices are carrying out housing functions.
- 2.8 The policy promotes the additional services that the Council offers, to encourage tenancy sustainment and independence. These include the Handyperson Scheme including cooker connection, lifeline alarm service and providing aids and adaptations to the home. At the same time, it generates additional income for the Council, for those services where a charge is applicable, for example, the Handyperson Scheme or lifeline alarm service.
- 2.9 The Council understands that moving home can be stressful for some people, especially those with a vulnerability. The policy promotes a service available for elderly and vulnerable tenants who have recently moved into a Council property. They are entitled to up to 2 hours of an operative's time, free of charge, to assist the tenant with minor improvements around the home, for example putting up curtain rails or putting together flat pack furniture. The criteria for eligibility of this service is set out in the policy.

2.10 The Council is committed to the principles of openness and transparency and for this reason, the policy includes a clause relating to this. If, for any reason, there are any operational matters which impact upon the Council's ability to operate this policy, they will ensure that information about this is given to residents and other stakeholders.

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Circulation of the Report: Councillor Ray Stanley, Management Team

List of Background Papers: A copy of such papers to be made available for public inspection and included on Website