

**Mid Devon District Council**

**Vulnerability Policy**

Policy Number: HSG v1.1

**March 2017**

DRAFT

## Version Control Sheet

*Title: Vulnerability Policy*

*Purpose:* To implement a new Vulnerability Policy in accordance with good practice and relevant legislative requirements.

**Owner: Housing Services Manager**  
**cfry@middevon.gov.uk**  
**Telephone number 01884 234920**

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*Status:* New policy

*Review Frequency:* **Every 4 years or sooner if required and in accordance with good practice and changes in legislation**

*Consultation* **This document was sent out for consultation to the following:**

Cabinet Member

Staff

Tenants Together

Management Team

Homes PDG

### Document History

This document obtained the following approvals.

<b>Title</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Version Approved</b>
Cabinet Member	22 February 2017	
Tenants Together		
Management Team	7 March 2017	
Homes PDG		
Cabinet		

## 1. Introduction

This policy statement outlines Mid Devon District Council's (MDDC), Housing Service's approach to identifying and supporting vulnerable tenants to help them to sustain their tenancies and promote independence.

## 2. Scope

This policy highlights the different vulnerabilities that people may face and explains some of the services available to them. This policy covers the following points and should be read in conjunction with the related documents as stated below:-

- Factors contributing to vulnerability
- Signs of potential vulnerability
- Children and vulnerable adults
- Support available
- The Equality Duty
- Additional services offered

## 3. Related Documents

- a. Tenancy Agreement
- b. Income Management Policy
- c. Anti-social behaviour Policy
- d. Domestic Abuse Policy
- e. Harassment Policy
- f. Community Alarm Policy
- g. Aids & Adaptations Policy
- h. Hoarding Policy
- i. Homelessness Strategy
- j. Allocations Policy
- k. Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults Policy
- l. Council Tax Reduction Scheme, Exceptional Hardship Policy

## 4. Definitions

The following definition applies to this policy:

**Vulnerable** means any individual who is, or may be, in need of help or support due to mental health difficulties, disability, age, illness or frailty and who are, or may be, unable to look after their home and/or their wellbeing or unable to protect themselves from harm or exploitation by others.

## 5. Factors contributing to vulnerability

5.1 A person's vulnerability or that of a member of their household may be brought to the Council's attention through:-

- A Devon Home Choice application;
- Requests for service, for example, Officers may become aware of a vulnerability when a tenant reports a repair;

- Local knowledge, through observation and/or information gathered whilst carrying out day to day housing management functions, eg following a Tenancy Home Check or as a result of income recovery action; or
- Information supplied by external agencies, for example, health, education or probation.

**5.3** There are many factors that may increase vulnerability, for example, mental health difficulties such as stress, anxiety, depression, dementia, bipolar disorder or schizophrenia.

**5.4** There may be risk factors associated with a person developing mental health difficulties, such as:-

- Biological factors caused by genetics or hormone imbalance;
- Physical factors, such as a disability;
- Social factors, such as poverty, deprivation, being a victim of domestic abuse, unemployment or isolation; or
- Psychological factors which refer to the kind of person someone is and the way they cope with life demands.

**5.5** Many people may have an increased risk of vulnerability. The risk factors may include:-

- A medical condition affecting their mental or physical health;
- A learning or physical disability;
- Language barriers;
- Substance misuse and/or an addiction;
- A recent history of homelessness;
- Financial problems, such as debts;
- Been a victim of domestic abuse or hate crime;
- Breached their tenancy;
- Had a relationship breakdown or suffered bereavement; or
- Difficulty in sustaining a tenancy and at risk of losing their home:
- Had a recent stay in hospital or other institutional care;
- Been in care;
- Just been released from prison

**5.6** There are a number of signs which may be taken as evidence of vulnerability (although there may be other indicators not included in this list):

- Lives alone and lonely
- Self neglect
- Difficulty managing housekeeping tasks
- Frail
- Having mobility problems
- Having a physical disability or other sensory difficulty
- Hoarding or other behaviour which results in health and safety issues or damage to the Council's property
- Erratic behaviour

- A failure to respond to correspondence, telephone calls or visits
- Being the victim or perpetrator of anti-social behaviour or harassment
- Having difficulty managing finances and paying bills
- Having an history of addiction or substance misuse

5.8 Homeless households moving into the Council's own housing stock may also be vulnerable and may require additional support to enable them to sustain their new tenancy.

## **6. Children and vulnerable adults**

6.1 The Council has a duty to protect children and vulnerable adults. If it is brought to the Council's attention where a situation has arisen where a child or a vulnerable adult is suspected or known to be at risk of abuse, Officers will refer to the Council's Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults Policy and Procedures. They will also liaise with the relevant agencies to raise their concerns.

6.2 Our Officers will have appropriate training to enable them to recognise signs of abuse of children or vulnerable adults; and to identify people who can no longer live independently. If they recognise that a tenant needs help to look after themselves, or to protect themselves or their assets, appropriate referrals will be made.

## **7. Support available**

7.1 The Council recognises that vulnerability can be experienced on a temporary or long term basis. Where vulnerability is highlighted, Officers of the Council will, where available, provide assistance or refer the individual to an alternative agency for advice and/or support.

7.2 Housing applicants will be given an opportunity to discuss the needs of their household during the allocation process.

7.3 There are two Community Housing Support Officers (CHSOs) who work within the Neighbourhood teams. Their role is to enable tenants to live independently within the community, providing support to sustain their tenancies and promoting social inclusion. They are able to signpost or to refer tenants to other agencies which can provide support and/ or assistance, as necessary.

7.4 These CHSOs will visit tenants who were previously homeless on a weekly basis for six weeks after the start of their tenancy, and after that, on an ad hoc basis, where necessary.

7.5 The Council will provide support to a tenant to sustain their tenancy. This may include:

- Visiting new tenants six weeks after moving into their tenancy, or more frequently, if necessary, in the first few weeks after letting

- Providing aids and adaptations to promote independent living;
- Providing financial help and advice
- Providing advice on getting repairs done;
- Providing documents in different formats , on request
- Sending documents to someone who can act on the behalf of the tenant, for example a family member or someone with Power of Attorney;
- Carrying out home visits for those tenants who cannot access the Council's Office;
- The provision of a hearing loop at Phoenix House;
- Offering a Lifeline alarm service, for a charge;
- Liaising with other agencies with specialist knowledge and services;
- Providing housing advice;
- Providing extra security through the Sanctuary Scheme for victims of domestic abuse who wish to stay in their own home; and
- Offering a referral to a mediation service where there is a neighbour disputes

## **8. Additional services offered**

- 8.1 For elderly and vulnerable tenants who have recently moved into a Council property, up to two hours of one of our workmen's time will be offered by the Housing Service, free of charge, to assist the tenant. In order to qualify for this service, the tenant must apply within two weeks of moving into their home and must be aged over 65 and/or registered as disabled.
- 8.2 The Council provides aids and adaptations for tenants or their household members who have a disability or who are suffering from long term ill health, to help them remain and live independently in the home. This will be dealt in accordance with the Council's Aids & Adaptations Policy.
- 8.3 The Handyperson Scheme will assist tenants with gardening and home improvements for a charge. All charges are in accordance to the National Housing Federation Schedule of Rates. Types of minor works that will be carried out include: hanging pictures, putting up shelves, fixing curtain rails and putting together flat-pack furniture.
- 8.4 The gardening service will be charged at an hourly rate plus VAT. The type of service offered includes, cutting grass, clearing paths of weeds and trimming hedges and trees that do not exceed 4ft.
- 8.5 The Council will offer a gas or electric cooker connection service at a competitive charge and this will be carried out by trained operatives.

## **9. Recording Vulnerability**

- 9.1 The Housing Service uses an electronic integrated housing management system and appropriate flags will be used on this especially when an adjustment is required to tailor the service to meet the needs of the tenant.

- 9.2 Where appropriate, this information will be shared with contractors and other third parties, in accordance with the relevant legislation and regulations relating to data protection.
- 9.3 All relevant information regarding vulnerabilities will be held electronically in the Council's document management system and will be shared appropriately and in accordance with relevant legislation and regulations relating to Data Protection.

## **10. Service standards**

- 10.1 We are committed to the principles of openness and transparency and for this reason we will ensure that this policy is well-publicised. If there are any operational matters which impact upon our ability to operate this policy, we will ensure that information about this is given to tenants and other stakeholders.

## **11. References**

- Housing Act 1985
- Data Protection Act 1998
- Homelessness Act 2002
- Mental Capacity Act 2005
- Equality Act 2010

## **11. Equality and Diversity**

- 11.1 The Housing Service tailors its services to meet the diverse needs of individuals. We foster good relations with people when providing services to eliminate discrimination and to promote opportunity of equality.
- 11.2 When making any decision about how to resolve certain matters, usually involving breaches of tenancy, the Housing Service must take the Equality Duty in to account. If someone is vulnerable, we will still take enforcement action but we must be able to demonstrate that we have reviewed the situation, taken account of all relevant factors and tailored our service to meet the needs of the tenant, and, where appropriate, considered alternative courses of action. Such assessments are undertaken as a matter of routine by Officers dealing with day to day housing management issues.

## **12. Review**

- 12.1 This Policy has been written in line with good practice and current relevant legislation. Unless there are any changes to such legislation beforehand, the next review of this Policy is due March 2021 and every four years thereafter.