

STEVE BIKO HOUSING ASSOCIATION

VULNERABLE PERSONS POLICY

Regulation & Legislation

This policy is linked to the following regulation and legislation: Every Child Matters and the Common Assessment Framework for Children, Liverpool Vulnerable Persons Protocol and Promoting Quality of Life for Older people, City of Liverpool and Borough of Sefton Safeguarding Adults – A Framework for Action – March 2006 and Audit Commission KLOE 11: Supported Housing, Supporting People.

Link to Steve Biko Housing Values & Corporate Plan

- Listening to and consulting with our customers to empower them to play an active role in planning and delivering our services;
- Ensuring equality of opportunity and recognising diversity for all of our customers, treating everyone fairly and without discrimination;
- Good design for the creation and maintenance of safe and sustainable communities;
- being an active and successful partner with other organisations to achieve real Improvements to customer service and our assets

Statement of Purpose

We are committed to providing suitable homes, creating and maintaining independence, tackling social exclusion and empowering people to have a better quality of life. We believe that assessment of need and appropriate support are key to sustaining an individual within the community.

It is recognised that the majority of residents, who take up tenancies with Steve Biko Housing Association will need little or no formal tenancy support, however some, including young people aged 16 or 17 and care leavers, will need such support and members of the Housing Partnership Board are committed to finding ways to provide that support.

This document acknowledges the Liverpool 'Homeless Strategy'; the 'Supporting People Strategy'; and the 'Housing Joint Protocol for the Assessment of Homeless Young People aged 16 or 17, and Care Leavers' and is intended to compliment these documents.

This document sets out a framework for SBHA to work with other supporting agencies and organisation within Liverpool who have an interest in sustaining tenancies, to ensure that all residents have the appropriate support to assist them in sustaining their tenancy.

Generally, all members of Steve Biko Housing Association will take every opportunity to give a common message to residents and prospective residents. The message being:

Steve Biko Housing Association recognise that an individual or household experiencing difficulties should be offered support to sustain their tenancy, and that where they are willing to accept that support, members of the Steve Biko Housing Association will work with them to assist them to sustain their tenancy and avoid eviction. This does not, however, mean that eviction will not take place if the individual or household will not co-operate and work with members of the Association to resolve tenancy issues.

Our Policy

1.1 We define vulnerability to mean, “those in need of care and support or those who require specific needs related advice and support”.

1.2 It is not possible to outline every situation where a resident could be considered Vulnerable or have complex needs.

Defining Principles

2.1 We will seek to provide good quality services and support to all who need it, linked to the principles of:

- a. Accountability
- b. Equality & Diversity
- c. Fairness
- d. Security
- e. Clarity
- f. Flexibility

2.2 We will aim to promote and safeguard independence and to involve vulnerable Persons in decision making at all levels of operation¹.

2.3 We will strive to provide an environment in which all people can thrive, irrespective of their circumstances.

3. Flexible Service provision

3.1a We are committed to design and deliver services to meet the needs of vulnerable customers. As such, we will seek to recognise people’s vulnerability in terms of:

Letting of housing – and engagement in services.

Steve Biko Housing Association will aim to ensure that adequate support and care packages are in place for vulnerable customers for the following;

3.2 Repairs and maintenance – SBHA seek to ensure the response to a repair reflects the needs of vulnerable customers;

3.3 Management of tenancies – SBHA seek to ensure that all policies recognise peoples differing circumstances.

3.4 SBHA will where necessary, and subject to availability, provides homes of sufficient size and flexibility to accommodate specific needs.

3.5 Members of the Steve Biko Housing Association are committed to supporting individuals and families resident in their homes and accessing services to achieve and sustain the best possible level of independent living. In order to achieve this goal, it is important to recognise that some individuals or families will need additional support on a short term, longer term or permanent basis.

People from all walks of life can experience vulnerability at some point in their lives so any definition of vulnerability must cover a wide remit. The definition used in this document is:

An individual or household experiencing difficulties with everyday living on account of financial, educational, health, employment, learning, language, behavioural, family, social or other circumstances/issues - or any combination of these.

3.6. Vulnerability can be a variable state, and can occur at particular points in life such as bereavement. It can be temporary, episodic and recurring due, for example, to mental distress, can be ongoing or can increase over time. Within a housing sector, the indicators or points of vulnerability can include:

- Homelessness;
- Hospitalisation;
- Periods following discharge from hospital or other institutional care;
- Periods of sustained illness at home;
- Period of change from supported accommodation to independent living;
- Evidence of neighbour harassment or abuse toward the individual or household;
- Evidence of anti-social behaviour by the individual or household;
- Arrears of rent or other debt problems;
- Benefit claims;
- Repeat homelessness; and
- During and following substance abuse.

It is essential, therefore, that consideration is given to potential vulnerability at all points of contact with residents and potential residents. In addition to this basic aspect of customer care, members of Steve Biko Housing Association are committed to:

A joint or common first stage assessment by trained staff for identification of potential support needs including referral on to more specialist assessment and support services as required.

In addition all staff and contracted partners will need to demonstrate that the ethos of this policy is intrinsic to their daily processes.

Who provides the support?

The support may be provided by any agency involved as deemed appropriate by the member of staff working with the vulnerable customer. Level of support will be determined at the pre-tenancy meeting or through other contacts between the various agencies, which may involve a case conference.

Steve Biko Housing Association may provide some low level support this will be agreed at the pre-tenancy meeting and agreed by the Director of the Association. In

other cases the support may be provided by a generic 'floating support' provider, Citizens Advice Bureaux, or where appropriate by one or more of other identified specialist agencies.

The various agencies invited to attend either a pre-tenancy meeting or a case conference will arrange for an appropriate representative to attend the meeting/conference giving at least 5 working days notice.

Every effort will be made Steve Biko Housing to ensure the agencies to meet earlier time scales where possible. (Where formal pre-tenancy meetings or case conferences are needed, initial contact should be by phone)
All meetings will be documented.

Monitoring – Monitoring will be required for the following:

- The number of Notices served upon residents with vulnerable status and the reason
- The number of possession orders obtained;
- Number of evictions, separately identifying: those receiving support, and from what source; and those not receiving support and whether due to lack of funding/resources; or non co-operation or refusal of the tenant.
- The incidence of neighbour complaints and anti-social behaviour;
- The incidence of recovery actions where benefit issues are outstanding; and
- The incidence of formal case conferences.

Steve Biko Housing will:

- Request statistical data, to support the monitoring referred to above, from Housing Services and other staff and support agencies involved and Housing Services will provide a standard format for reporting such data;
- Provide timely feedback to Operational Meetings on the statistical data received;
- Ensure that appropriate officers, whether existing or newly recruited, are fully conversant with the detail of this protocol and receive appropriate training as required.
- Share information as required when responding to a request from a partner HA for a nomination to a specific tenancy; Information to include the following :
 - Any tenancy support given to the nominee.
 - Any known involvement by any support agency with the nominee; and
 - Any concern that the nominee may need tenancy support, even if tenancy support has not previously been given and there is no involvement of any support agency.

- Ensure that outstanding Housing Benefit claims (subject to all appropriate information being received from the claimant) are resolved within 5 working days of a request from a partner Housing Association, when considering application to the court for possession on grounds of arrears.
- Ensure that residents known to be vulnerable are personally visited at the time of housing benefit review. The purpose of this visit is to deliver the renewal form and assist the claimant in completing it. Housing Benefit (HB) staff will undertake the visit.
- Will accept from any partner Housing Associations, a referral for a resident that is considered to be vulnerable in relation to assessment.
- Should inform the housing benefit team (where HB payments have been made) within 24 hours of any eviction taking place.

Key roles and responsibilities

4.2 Partner Housing Associations (HAs) will:

- use the tool of eviction as a last resort in dealing with breaches of tenancy;
- seek clarification from the Borough's housing benefit team that there are no outstanding benefit issues, before taking significant recovery action such as service of notice, or possession action in the courts;
- seek the assistance of the various statutory and voluntary agencies in dealing with serious tenancy breaches;
- ensure that the Borough's homelessness team and the County's Social Services teams, as well as any other agency known to be directly assisting the resident, are aware of significant steps that are taken towards gaining possession of a home, including:
 - an application to the court for an order for possession; and
 - an application for a warrant of possession
- consider the views of the various departments of the Borough, as well as those of other interested statutory or voluntary agencies, and work with them to avoid, wherever possible, the eviction of a resident by ensuring that the resident has every opportunity to resolve all issues that threaten the sustainability of their tenancy;
- Provide the Association, on request, with appropriate data in a timely fashion. Such data to be used to monitor the effectiveness of this protocol; and
- Ensure that appropriate officers, whether existing or newly recruited, are fully conversant with the detail of this protocol and receive appropriate training as referred to in 3.6 and 3.9 of the Policy Statement.
- Ensure that only those residents who specifically require the personal visit by housing benefit staff (penultimate bullet point under 4.1) are so referred to the housing benefit team.

Design

SBHA will seek to:

4.1 Designing new homes on suitable locations, close to local amenities, services and support networks for a variety of needs.

4.2 Provide homes where appropriate with suitable aids, adaptations and assistive technology.

4.3 Inform and shape the delivery of flexible service provision we will develop a database of all customers to reflect the particular needs of local customers.

Abuse

5.1 In all cases where abuse is suspected or known. SBHA will follow the procedures as set out in City Of Liverpool and Borough of Sefton Safeguarding Adults A Framework for Action – March 2006. These procedures must be used where there is a concern, allegation or disclosure of abuse against any adult who is a resident of the City of Liverpool or Borough of Sefton. (Copies of the document will be circulated to all managers and available to all staff working with the organisation)

{The document outlines standards for a safer service inclusive of recruitment and practice and investigation of Adult Protection issues and appendices of forms for recording and reporting purposes and will be available for all managers and accessible for staff at SBHA}. .

Formal reporting channels are as follows:

Emergencies 999 for Police or Ambulance

Care Line Liverpool: 0151 233 3800 (Phone Number for autonomous practitioners Liverpool)

Adult Protection Co-ordinator Liverpool – Yvonne Jones Tel: 0151 233 3800

The procedures as set out in the framework apply to any concern, allegation or disclosure in any setting against any adult who is a resident of the City of Liverpool or Borough of Sefton. .

Access and Information

5.3. SBHA will seek to ensure access to appropriate support services

5.4. SBHA will also provide translations, interpreters, signers, audiotapes, Braille or Large print documents to meet identified needs where appropriate.

5.5. SBHA recognises the role of carers, advocates and personal representatives, and where appropriate, shall take their views into account when consulting vulnerable residents on issues that affect them.

Partnership Working

6.1 SBHA will work with local authorities and service providers to understand housing and support needs more fully. Support meetings will be arranged with partner agencies wherever complex need has been identified.

6.2 SBHA will continue to develop links and good working relationships with agencies Providing support to customers to sustain their tenancies.

6.3 Where we provide direct services, our aim is to provide high quality, delivered by a well-trained workforce, strategically planned, cost effective, complementing existing Services and are informed and shaped by our customers.

6.4 Members of SBHA agreed to share appropriate and necessary information to Enable effective first stage and specialist assessment, referral and review of the support needs of vulnerable residents and potential residents. The permission of all residents and potential residents will be sought before information is disclosed, except in exceptional circumstances as governed by data protection legislation and guidance. The information disclosed will be sufficient, impartial and valid. The information will include an initial assessment of risk to self or others posed by the resident or potential resident

7 Supporting Agencies offer the following support;

Citizen's Advice Bureau will:

- provide advice to residents referred or signposted by Housing Associations particularly in respect of financial difficulties that lead to arrears of rent, and attempt to find an acceptable solution to both the resident and the HA;
- Liaise with the City housing benefit team where they are working with a resident to resolve financial difficulties.

Floating Support providers will:

- Provide appropriate tenancy support (dependant upon capacity available) to individuals who are identified at either a pre-tenancy meeting or case conference as needing such support. Priority should be given to people at points of transition;
- Ensure that appropriate officers, attend pre-tenancy meetings with the Association in an advocacy role for the vulnerable person.
- Be made aware of Steve Biko Housing Association Vulnerable person's policy and working protocols.

Other local statutory and voluntary agencies

A range of support agencies will be identified by Steve Biko Housing Services to assist access for vulnerable people, these may include:

Probation Service
Social Services
Youth Offending Team
Access
Supporting People

It is envisaged that inter-agency support will:

- Provide assistance to Steve Biko Housing potential/current residents, who are customers of the service, to enable them to sustain their tenancy.
- Enable clear lines of communication for between agencies working with Steve Biko Housing Association where necessary and appropriate.
- Ensure that appropriate officers, whether existing or newly recruited, are fully conversant with the detail of this Policy statement and received appropriate training to support effective implementation of work with vulnerable adults and partnership agencies.

8. Pre –tenancy meeting and support

A pre-tenancy meeting may be called by Steve Biko Housing Association, or other interested agency (this meeting may, in some circumstances, be merely a telephone discussion between two parties, if this is all that is required to resolve the issue).

The organisation calling the meeting will arrange a suitable date and venue, and service the meeting.

The purpose of such a meeting is to review the support needs of the proposed tenant and to decide on an appropriate support plan. It is expected that the representatives of the various agencies attending these meetings will collectively be capable of undertaking a detailed assessment of the support needs of the individual or household and making decision whether a tenancy offer is suitable for the vulnerable applicant.

8.1. Care should be taken to ensure a new tenant is fully aware of what is expected of them as a tenant. This will include ensuring that application for Housing and Council Tax Benefit are completed at sign-up. It may be appropriate in some cases for the agency providing the support package to be present at the sign-up interview.

Consideration should be given to other access support measures should be used in addition to assist with the completion of the tenancy agreement.

8.2. The support provider could be any specialist provider, or indeed an in-house facility at Steve Biko Housing Association e.g. staff member with specialist skills.

Steve Biko Housing Association should as a matter of good practice:

- clarify whether there are any outstanding housing benefit issues; and
- Signpost residents who experience difficulties in meeting rent payments to an independent debt advice service such as the Citizen's Advice Bureaux (CAB).
- As part of this protocol, Steve Biko Housing agree to specifically advise such residents to contact their local CAB no later than at the point of service or a Notice Seeking Possession (NSP) or a Notice Requiring Possession (NRP)

8.3. If other issues seem to underlie rent arrears, it may be appropriate to move to involve other support agencies.

9.1 Arrangements to pay

9.2 For proposed new tenancies, prospective tenants should always be advised to obtain a pre-tenancy determination of benefits, before sign-up to the tenancy.

9.3 When arrears occur arrangement to pay should be over the shortest possible period (in Line with rent recovery policy of SBHA) and, where practicable, be designed to clear arrears within one year. Where a support agency have made a specific referral, SBHA will liaise with the agency concerned for a period of 28 days to allow support to undertake their work with the resident.

9.2. Steve Biko Housing will agree not to actively pursue action for possession in respect of rent arrears, where there is an arrangement to pay the debt with the resident, and the arrangement is up-to-date following meeting to agree terms acceptable to the Association.

9.3. Where another support agency have been instrumental in setting up an agreement to pay, the Steve Biko HA will inform support agency that the agreement to pay has failed. SBHA will generally hold off taking action for possession for a period of 5 working days to allow support agency to attempt to help tenant to get up-to-date with the agreement to pay off the debt. If, however, SBHA feel they have to proceed with an application to the court for possession before CAB/floating support have an opportunity to resolve an appropriate agreement, and an acceptable agreement to pay is subsequently arranged, SBHA will consider withdrawing the application, or adjourn the application at the court and not require the resident to pay costs.

9.4 A case conference* should involve any agency that is likely to provide assistance to the resident to help them sustain their tenancy. For serious cases of anti-social behaviour, agencies could well include the police or the CDRP.

9.5 A case conference, where circumstances warrant, may be merely a telephone discussion or email conversations between two or more parties, if this is sufficient to resolve the issue, a face to face meeting is recommended as the preferred option. A case conference should involve any agency that is likely to provide assistance to the resident to help them maintain independent living.

9.6. SBHA will work with appropriate agencies until issue(s) are resolved (calling as many case conferences as is considered necessary) or until it is felt that no further work can be undertaken to assist the resident and eviction takes place.

When any significant legal action is taken against the resident for possession, i.e.:

- application to the court for a possession order; or
- an application for a warrant of possession,

SBHA will inform the City's homelessness team, and the residents 'support agency worker /anyone else involved in providing support and assistance to the resident. This will enable any such agency to call a case conference to discuss the issue.

Whilst it is the aim of all partners to this protocol to sustain tenancies wherever possible there will be occasions when, despite our collective efforts, we are unable to persuade residents that it in their interests to conduct their tenancies appropriately. In these circumstances eviction is likely to be inevitable.

- 9.7. If a resident is evicted, and they have been in receipt of housing benefit, the tenants housing benefit team should be informed without delay. This will prevent an overpayment.

Equality and Diversity Assessment

- 8.1 In addition to the monitoring of key areas of our service, officers will seek to identify any Equality and Diversity issues as they arise in their work with vulnerable people.

Financial Impact

The provision of services to vulnerable people will be directed by the Association's business plan and managed through conventional financial regulations.

Risk Assessment

By not adhering closely to this policy, we may not be fulfilling our duty of care towards our customers.

Where Steve Biko Housing Association decides it is inappropriate to allocate a tenancy to a vulnerable person due to lack of an appropriate support plan, such decision should be communicated to the person and supporting agency within 5 working days.

Steve Biko Housing Association will advise the vulnerable person/support agency to contact CAB/floating support who can work with resident in an attempt to find an acceptable solution as quickly as possible

Consultation

Assistance and support where appropriate will be given to enable vulnerable people to engage with customer service satisfaction reviews and other areas of tenant participation required by Steve Biko Housing Association.

Monitoring and Review

The operation of this policy will be reviewed every bi-annually by staff and Management Board of Steve Biko Housing Association including resident/customer representation. The outcome of the review will be communicated to all members of the organisation.

Operational policy development staff will make team aware of interim amendments to working practice as and when changes in legislation dictate. Staff will be required to undertake training to update work practices as required by the Association.

This policy has been agreed on by all members Steve Biko Housing Association Board, who are each committed to supporting individuals and families to achieve and sustain the best possible level of independent living.

Ref: The Prime Ministers Social Exclusion Unit (2006)
City of Liverpool and Borough of Sefton – Safeguarding Adults – A Framework for Action March 2006
A Sure Start to Later Life ~ Ending Inequalities for Older People

Ref: Basingstoke Vulnerable persons protocol housing partnership (2005)
Ref: Liverpool Irish Society Vulnerable Persons & Child Protection (2006)
The Children Act 1989; the Police Act 1997; The Data Protection Act 1998;
The Human Rights Act 1998;

SBHA/CRM/07/2008

Agreed at Board Meeting held on 22.9.08

