



Policy Name: RBK Vulnerable Adults' Housing Policy

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Purpose

Kingston Borough Council ('the Council') owns and manages 4,620 properties which are a mixture of general needs and homes for older people. As well as being a social housing landlord, the Council provides housing advice and assistance to residents and has a duty to prevent homelessness in the Borough. In addition, the Council seeks to improve the quality and suitability of homes in the private sector, from owner occupied homes and caravans to privately rented flats and houses in multiple occupancy.

The Council aims to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to access and benefit from its services, but realises that for some people who use our services, barriers may exist which may prevent participation.

The objectives of this Policy are to set out:

- How vulnerabilities and support needs are identified and the importance of recording any vulnerability on case notes and keeping this up to date
- How we assist vulnerable residents and customers in accessing housing services they may need
- How we consider any additional needs due to vulnerability and where appropriate vary our service delivery to ensure vulnerable residents still receive the same level of service
- The safeguards which are in place to protect vulnerable adults
- How we will take account of known vulnerability factors in the provision of services and in decisions around tenancy management and enforcement
- How Housing Services staff will signpost and refer vulnerable adults to other services and organisations, when they require additional support.

This Vulnerable Adults' Housing Policy links with the Council's other housing policies <https://www.kingston.gov.uk/housing-policies-reports> and Adult & Children Safeguarding policies and procedures <https://www.kingston.gov.uk/adult-safeguarding/safeguarding-adults-mean>

Vulnerable adult definition

For the purpose of this Policy, a vulnerable adult is defined as:

- Anyone aged 18 or above or aged 16/17 with a guarantor; and

- who experiences difficulties with everyday living to the extent that they need some additional support to make sure they are not at any disadvantage and /or to sustain the occupancy of their home and maintain independence

. The definition does not replace statutory definitions, for example in homelessness legislation.

The Council recognises that someone can be vulnerable for a number of reasons, this list is not intended to be exhaustive, but these reasons may include:

- Mental health problems
- Learning disability or difficulty
- Sensory impairment
- Physical disability or illness
- They are frail and elderly, aged over 60
- They have alcohol or substance misuse problems
- They are an ex-offender
- They are experiencing domestic abuse or harassment
- They have left Care
- They have been recently bereaved
- English is not spoken, or spoken only as a second language
- They are a member of the Gypsy, Roma or Traveller community
- They were previously a member of the Armed Forces
- They lack capacity to make decisions for themselves (under the Mental Capacity Act 2005)

A person may be vulnerable as a result of a single problem or condition, or due to a combination of factors. Vulnerability can also occur at different points in a person's life, for instance someone may need support following bereavement for a temporary period, whereas another may require support permanently.

This Policy does not assume that whole groups of people are vulnerable. For example, it is not correct to assume that all older people are vulnerable or that all disabled people are vulnerable.

There are a number of signs that someone may be vulnerable. These may include, but are not limited to the following:

- Concerns about an adult whose care and support needs are not to being met
- Falling into rent arrears or other debt problems
- Issues with maintaining the tenancy
- Being the victim, or perpetrator, of anti-social behaviour, hate crime or harassment
- Disputes with neighbours
- Damage to the person's home
- A detrimental change to a person's physical appearance
- A failure to respond to correspondence or to answer the door when visited
- Self-neglect, hoarding or other behaviour which results in the person's home and/or garden becoming damaged, neglected or otherwise unfit for occupation

Legal duties and regulatory requirements

RBK 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” but we recognise that many other residents can be vulnerable for reasons other than the characteristics protected under the equalities legislation, and this policy sets out how we define vulnerability and how we aim to respond to those customers’ needs.

The Social Housing Regulator’s Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard requires registered providers to “treat all tenants with fairness and respect” and “demonstrate that they understand the different needs of tenants, including in relation to the equality strands and tenants with additional support needs” with a specific expectation that providers will “demonstrate how they respond to those needs in the way they provide services and communicate with tenants”.

The Housing Ombudsman Complaints Handling Code 2020 states that landlords should “comply with the Equality Act 2010 and may need to adapt normal policies, procedures, or processes to accommodate an individual’s needs. Landlords shall have a reasonable adjustments policy in place to address this”.

The Government's Charter for Social Housing Residents¹ needs to see all housing associations and local authority landlords using their knowledge of vulnerable tenants to

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monitor and support those tenants who may be at risk from crime and anti-social behaviour as well as supporting positive physical and mental health and removing barriers and access to housing and services.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-charter-for-social-housing-residents-social-housing-white-paper/the-charter-for-social-housing-residents-social-housing-white-paper#executive-summary>

How vulnerable adults are identified

When a tenant or service user contacts the Housing Service there is an opportunity to identify whether they need extra support because of a vulnerability in the household. Because someone can become vulnerable at different stages of their lives, it is essential that identification of support required is not just at the point of first contact, but is picked up whenever contact is made.

Support Needs can be identified by Officers in a number of ways:

- Various application forms that include a checklist, for example, the Council's housing register application form & housing advice form for those at risk of homelessness and where possible the Tell Us Once service may help identify a household member who has been recently bereaved.
- During the initial tenancy sign-up or during other home visits
- Over the phone, face to visits, any contact with the housing service
- Notification from relatives, neighbours or friends
- During calls or visits by officers in designated Housing for Older People Schemes
- If any member of staff or contractor has concerns they will refer the customer or tenant to the relevant housing service.
- Notifications from professionals, such as Occupational Therapists, Children or Adults Social Workers, Support Workers, or GPs

Recording Information

We will record on the database any known vulnerability, any particular communication or access needs and whether there is anyone with delegated authority to speak to us on the residents' behalf, such as a care or support worker. This will ensure our staff will have advanced knowledge of any additional factors to consider when delivering services.

The member of staff will record the nature of the vulnerability and how the customer or tenant has been assisted e.g. 'referral to Adult Social Care' and any other agencies working with the customer or tenant on the users housing file.

The purpose of recording this information is to ensure that when any future contact with a tenant or service user is made, there is a record of the level and type of support required to enable the member of staff to act accordingly.

Staff may also liaise with agencies who are working with the tenant or customer and their household to resolve any housing issues.

What happens when a tenant or service user is identified as needing extra support

When a tenant or service user is identified as vulnerable (according to the Housing Services definition above) by a member of staff, that member of staff will seek to support the service user in a number of ways, which are highlighted in this Policy.

The nature of the assistance provided will depend on the level of vulnerability and the individual's, or the household's circumstances. Some assistance may be provided by Housing Staff directly, or via third parties (e.g. Financial Inclusion, Advice Agencies etc)

As part of our routine service delivery we already provide an appropriate level of support for tenants and service users as well as our dedicated support services and a robust safeguarding referral process. Where a vulnerable tenant or service user has been identified, they can be assessed for further advice and support and where appropriate referred to another service.

Check up visits

If a tenant is identified as vulnerable by someone other than a member of staff, for example a relative, then a Housing Officer, or a Temporary Accommodation Officer or Move On Officer will carry out a check (which may be a phone conversation or a visit, a visit is preferable), where they will investigate the tenants or customers support needs and, provide support as required, and if appropriate, refer them to the relevant organisations or services.

Regular reviews will be completed to ensure the information held regarding a tenant or service user household's support needs is up to date and accurate. This will be a minimum of once a year and every contact with a tenant is a chance to check if they need any further

housing support. At the end of these reviews any inaccurate information will be removed from the users housing file and evidence of a review documented in any notes.

General signposting and referrals

When a member of staff identifies someone who needs additional support they will seek to signpost or refer the person to appropriate support if it is needed. Some of the services signposted or referred to may include for example:

- GPs and other health services
- Mental health services
- Adult Social Services (for care and support services or safeguarding)
- Floating Support Services for those struggling to live independently
- Support & Move On (if in Temporary Accommodation)
- Housing Solutions (if threatened with Homelessness)
- Occupational Health for Aids and Adaptations
- Substance misuse services
- Domestic abuse services
- Debt advice and welfare benefit services
- Advocacy services

It is also recognised that carers, who are caring for vulnerable people in a voluntary capacity (e.g. partner, relative or friend), may also need support in fulfilling their responsibilities and in looking after their own wellbeing. Carer's will be signposted, wherever appropriate, for carer's assessments and/or to other carer's support.

Making adjustments to service delivery arrangements

We will use vulnerability information proactively to inform the way we deliver our services.

This may include:

- more regular contact maintained;
- agreeing a nominated contact person (e.g. a carer);
- providing information in other formats, where agreed with the customer, that this is the most appropriate means of communication (e.g. translations, interpreters, signers, audiotapes, Braille, large print documents);

- allowing more time for the person to get to the telephone or door;
- accelerating repairs for people with particular health and/or vulnerability issues which we are working to put in place;
- waiving recharges for repairs in certain circumstances, with the approval of a manager; providing assistance to maintain the homes and gardens of vulnerable residents who have no other help available to them e.g. garden aid scheme.
- Providing an assisted bidding service for Choice Based Lettings
- Supporting people with benefits claims or form filling

Mental capacity

The Mental Capacity Act 2005 (the Act) assumes that every individual has capacity unless it is otherwise established but also provides the legal framework for acting and making decisions on behalf of people (aged 16 or over) who lack the mental capacity to make particular decisions for themselves.

Where it is established that a tenant or service user does not have the mental capacity to make decisions for themselves, the Housing Service will work with carers, advocates and legal representatives of the service users to ensure they are able to access the services they need in line with the Act.

Safeguarding vulnerable adults from abuse and neglect

Safeguarding duties apply to adults who:

- Have needs for care and support (whether or not they are receiving any services); and
- Are experiencing, or at risk of, abuse or neglect; and
- As a result of those care and support needs are unable to protect themselves from either the risk of, or the experience of abuse or neglect

If a safeguarding concern is identified by a member of staff, they will follow the Council's Safeguarding Policy to make a referral to Adult Social Services, or the Police in an emergency, to protect the adult from harm

Suicide risk

If there are concerns that a tenant or service user is experiencing suicidal feelings or is at risk of self harm, staff are expected to use the guidance in the Kingston Flyer - Frontline Distress 200120.

 [Kingston Flyer - Frontline Distress Nov 23](#)

Addressing loneliness

Loneliness is defined as “a subjective, unwelcome feeling of lack or loss of companionship. It happens when we have a mismatch between the quantity and quality of social relationships that we have, and those that we want”

Adults have been the focus of most of the research around loneliness, although loneliness can affect anyone of any age and background. Loneliness does not discriminate and it is recognised that you do not have to be vulnerable to experience loneliness – although it is acknowledged a person’s vulnerability may increase this risk for some. The housing officer or support worker may be able to point out local groups, volunteering opportunities and schemes which you may be interested in joining

Rent arrears

Where a vulnerable RBK tenant is in rent arrears, extra visits by the Income Officer may be organised. The Council can apply for Alternative Payment Arrangements for vulnerable tenants who cannot manage their single monthly payment when they are claiming Universal Credit.

The requirements for early intervention in the Pre Action Protocol for Possession Claims by Social Landlords will be followed and action taken to resolve rent arrears before commencing with possession proceedings. Referrals will be made to the Financial Inclusion Service to look at ways to help maximise income. The Housing Officer will seek to signpost and refer tenants who have ongoing issues with financial management to other organisations, such as Citizens Advice and debt advice agencies, who are able to give advice and guidance regarding budgeting and applying for benefits.

Legal action - RBK tenants

Every attempt will be made to avoid legal action in the first place. Referrals will be made to the Housing Solutions team for tenants who may be at risk of homelessness.

As stated, the Council is aware of its duties under the Equalities Act 2010 and these will be considered in dealing with any breach of tenancy conditions and where necessary will undertake an assessment at relevant stages (being mindful of obligations under the Pre Action Protocol for Possession Claims by Social Landlords).

The below RBK Council teams, provide support for vulnerable adults

Community Housing

The housing community team consists of Housing Solutions and support teams and Accommodation Services team

Housing Solutions and support What they do?

- Prevention of Homelessness
- Support & Move on for those in Temporary Accommodation
- Income Maximisation (formerly welfare reform)
- Older and Vulnerable Persons & Resettlement Floating Support

Housing Solutions Team

The Housing Solutions Team provides support for vulnerable adults who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 the team can give people housing advice, and if they are eligible for support, let them know what help they can expect to receive and practical help for them to stay in their home or find somewhere else to live. The team can also give specific advice and information if people are: experiencing domestic abuse or mental health issues, leaving hospital or leaving care, or if they have recently left prison or youth detention, or if they have been in the armed forces. The team operates a daily 9-5 duty rota, and people can contact them by telephone or email to arrange an initial appointment or for advice to be provided over the phone. Adjustments can be made for those who need it, for example arranging translators or support. Support outside of working hours is provided by the out of hours emergency line.

If a vulnerable tenant or service user, or have already lost their home, a Housing Solutions Officer will arrange an appointment to find out about what has caused the household to be homeless or threatened with homelessness. They will also ask about their housing needs and any other help that they or their family needs. The council and the person approaching for support will then work together to list the reasonable steps they will both take to help the household keep their home or find somewhere suitable to live. These steps need to be right for the person and their situation, so they will take their needs into account. The results of this conversation are written down to form a personalised housing plan which is regularly reviewed. Again, if translators or support is needed then this is arranged by the Housing Solutions Officer.

Support & Move On Team

For those placed in Temporary Accommodation, support is then provided by the Support & Move On Team who will undertake home visits. This is a new team (September 2023) and the intention is that they will visit those in Temporary Accommodation at least every year, to support and sign-post to ensure that people can move to more settled accommodation. They undertake a full assessment of need at these visits, including any support needs, sign-post where appropriate, and update the homelessness casework system accordingly.

Income Maximisation Team

The Income Maximisation Team (formerly the Welfare Reform Team) primarily assists people who are affected by the benefit cap and the "bedroom tax" to claim Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) to cover the shortfall in their rent.

The team further assists those affected to become exempt from the cap, through applying for other benefits, moving, working or gaining employment.

The team carries out home visits where necessary and has made links with other institutions in the borough and seeks to extend these to raise the profile of the team and awareness of the work that it carries out to sustain tenancies and prevent homelessness.

They can be contacted by phone or email, and adjustments will always be made for those who need it.

Floating Support for older and vulnerable people (OVP support)

The Older and Vulnerable People's Support Service is part of Kingston Council Adult Social Care and is fully funded by Adult Care Social Services, the team however sits in Community Housing.

The team advises and supports adults aged 55 years and over in a holistic manner to maintain their accommodation and independence within the community on a short term basis (usually 6 months). They help people to manage their finances and give advice on benefits, rent arrears, health and wellbeing support, to access accessible transport solutions (eg bus passes, dial a ride, taxi card). As well as help in accessing/signposting to Adult Social Care for personal care, aids and adaptations. They also support people to set up home and utilities, maintain their tenancies and can give advice on cleaning and hoarding issues.

Resettlement Floating Support

Like the Older & Vulnerable People's support service the Resettlement Team is funded by Adult Social Care, but sits in Community Housing. They work with RBK tenants who are deemed vulnerable and are at risk of losing their home, aged 18 to 54.

The team can support a tenant or service user when they move into their new homes, to maintain their current or new tenancies and also assist a tenant or service user to achieve independence and empowerment. They can help with arrears, welfare benefits, support to manage in the home, liaising & signposting to other services etc.

All tenants or service users are referred through Statutory or voluntary support and advice agencies, Royal Borough of Kingston Council Housing and RBK Finance Services, Adult and children's social services & Women's refuges and reasonable adjustments will be made to enable people to access the service. If a tenant or service user is eligible for the service they will be allocated a caseworker and a support plan devised, this will be reviewed every 3 months.

Accommodation Services

The teams in Accommodation Services are responsible for:

- Property Management of Temporary Accommodation
- Management of the Housing Register and Choice Based Lettings Scheme

- Allocation of temporary and permanent accommodation
- Leasing Schemes and Procurement of Temporary Accommodation

How do they assist vulnerable adults?

Temporary Accommodation Team

The team is responsible for the property management of all types of Temporary Accommodation, including Bed & Breakfast, other nightly paid accommodation which can be self contained or in a shared house, the Councils four Hostels & Private Sector Leasing Schemes. This includes repairs (although these are sometimes the landlord's responsibility), Health & Safety compliance including gas, electric, fire and water, rent, damp and mould and dealing with disputes. They carry out home visits on an annual basis, sometimes more for shared accommodation, and will refer any issues where tenants require support to the Support & Move on Team, the Resettlement team or raise a Safeguarding alert.

Housing Register & Rehousing Team

Housing Register - To apply for social housing, a tenant or service user must first register on the Housing register. If they are unable to complete the online version of the form and do not have a friend, family member or support worker who can assist them, they can contact the Team who can support them.

All applicants will be asked to re-register every 12 months to ensure their circumstances remain the same. The team will write to the applicant or contact them by their preferred method to confirm if their circumstances remain the same.

Choice Based lettings - If an a tenant or service user is vulnerable or unable to bid for themselves, and they have no one who can assist them, they can register for auto bidding. Auto bidding is also used for homeless applicants who are owed a main duty. The system is given instructions on the properties that will match the person's housing need and then it bids on their behalf. Accessible properties for those with disabilities, and properties for older people are ring-fenced for those with the corresponding need.

Allocation To Temporary Accommodation

An assessment of housing and support needs is carried out for all applicants which will identify any support needs and risks that the household presents with that may need to be taken into account in any temporary accommodation placement. RBK will, where possible,

try to secure suitable emergency and temporary accommodation within the Borough to allow a household to maintain their existing networks, such as employment, schooling, medical care and family and social support. However, due to the very limited supply of temporary accommodation, this is not always possible.

The Financial Inclusion Service

The financial Inclusion Service takes a holistic and practical approach to resolving problems and preventing homelessness by improving outcomes in a range of areas, including: managing money, claiming benefits, debt including rent arrears,

Housing for older persons team / Careline service

Housing for Older Persons team, what do they do?

The Housing Service has 8 housing schemes for older people and provides for a broad section of community needs including people who have housing issues and may require additional assistance with daily living tasks. Most residents have their own flat, with kitchen and bathroom facilities some of our schemes have shared kitchen and bathroom facilities. There are also communal lounges, guest rooms, laundries and gardens at some of these schemes. The schemes are managed by a team of mobile Housing Officers.

How do they assist vulnerable adults?

Housing Officers are available to provide an enhanced housing management service to tenants, this includes:

1. The provision of an emergency alarm system with 24 hour monitoring - provided by separate Alarm & Response service currently Milton Keynes
2. Help in maintaining independence and sustaining tenancies
3. Monitoring wellbeing
4. Contacting the GP or emergency services
5. Gaining access to other services, such as, hands on care from Social Services or requesting aids and adaptations to make life easier and safer
6. Guidance on personal safety and security
7. Signposting to advice on benefit claims
8. Advice on getting repairs done
9. Signposting to help with paying rent or utility bills
10. Resolve low level anti-social behaviour issues
11. All tenants who want to can have personal contact with a Housing Officer for Older People at least once a week via a welfare call
12. Residents can also request additional contact with their Housing Officer for any ad-hoc assistance or advice.
13. An annual tenancy visit which includes the completion of a Person Centred Fire Risk Assessment

The Housing Management Team

Housing Management, what do they do?

The Housing Management Team manages the Council's general needs rented accommodation. The team, sign up new tenants, resolve anti-social behaviour and ensures that neighbourhoods are safe and socially inclusive spaces. The team also manage the Council's owned Gypsy and Traveller site and the Council's garage stock.

How do they assist vulnerable adults?

All new tenants are contacted six weeks after their tenancy has commenced, giving opportunities to resolve any difficulties or signpost to additional services. Tenants are also asked if they would like to continue with follow up contact. When carrying out estate walkabouts , a range of issues can be identified where vulnerable residents may need support and information.

Anti-social behaviour Team (ASB)

The ASB team deals with ASB and other breaches of tenancy conditions . The Council recognises that vulnerable people may not only be the victims but also the perpetrators of ASB and that early intervention is a priority. Housing representatives will work in partnership with a range of different organisations (such as the Police, Social Services, Education, and the Council's Community Safety Unit) to resolve a tenant's problems.

Domestic Abuse

If a tenant is at risk of Domestic Abuse, the Housing Service may enhance the security of property locks, doors, windows etc. support would be provided via an IDVA (Independent Domestic Violence Advisor) as they are specialists in this field, housing staff may be able to refer to the housing panel for a possible management transfer. They can also be referred to DV Marac which is a DV Multi-Agency which meets once a month.

Housing Officers will always consider alternative methods to resolve ASB such as anti-social behaviour agreements and referral to support agencies, only taking court action to end a tenancy as a last resort. Evidence of how a decision was made and considerations taken into account will be added to an tenants file.

Housing Repairs and Maintenance Team

Housing Repairs and Maintenance Team, what do they do?

The Housing Repairs and Maintenance Team repair and renew council properties. The team install disabled adaptations in council properties following a request from a Kingston Occupational Therapist.

How do they assist vulnerable adults?

The Council aims to prioritise non-emergency repairs for elderly and vulnerable tenants wherever possible (for example lift malfunction, heating and hot water) where the nature of the repair could risk the health or wellbeing of that person or household.

The team work with an Occupational Therapist to make a home suitable for a disabled tenant through the installation of suitable adaptations. They also prioritise vulnerable adults in cases of damp and mould.

A free Handyman scheme is available to carry out small DIY tasks for tenants who are 65 or disabled, or who live in a Council housing scheme.

- An Older Person's Decoration Scheme is offered to households where all members of the household are 65 years or older, or if a person is physically disabled and living independently.
- If a repairs or gas servicing contractor has concerns that a tenant may require extra support or there are safeguarding concerns, they fill out a 'resident referral form and return it to the Housing Officer. The Housing Officer then contacts the tenant to resolve any unmet need within 5 working days of receiving the referral.

Private Sector Housing Team

Private Sector Housing Team, what do they do?

The Private Sector Housing Team aims to improve the condition of housing in the private sector in all private sector tenures (privately rented, owner occupied, housing association tenants) and housing types including traditional family homes, houses in multiple occupation (HMO) , mobile homes/caravans and houseboats.

How do they assist vulnerable adults?

Inspections are carried out in private rented properties (including supported living units which can fall under the definition of a HMO) and housing health and safety standards are enforced. A variety of financial support schemes are provided to help residents to remain in their homes by assisting them in adapting, improving or repairing. There is financial

assistance to enable hospital discharge, to reduce admissions and readmissions into hospital, to promote independence or enable the provision of safe care.

Financial assistance is subject to eligibility criteria being met and possibly a means test. Home Improvement Agency Caseworker visits to assist with applications from service users, income maximisation and other service signposting are available to all services users along with Surveying, Project Management and Contract Administration services.

Advice is provided on getting repairs completed as well as signposting service users to Checkatrade and TrustMark for a list of vetted and reviewed contractors in the local area. Where appropriate, service users are also signposted or referred to Kingston Fire and Rescue Service for Safe and Well home visits.

Complaints

If a tenant or service user is not satisfied with the service they have received from the Housing Service, the Council's Corporate Complaints Procedure can be followed.

Data protection

The UK GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018 regulate the processing of information relating to individuals, which includes the obtaining, holding, using or disclosing of such information.

The Council needs to collect and use certain types of information about its service users in order to carry out its everyday business and to fulfil its objectives and its statutory functions. The Council's: privacy notices sets out how it will protect special category and criminal convictions personal data;

Equality and diversity

The Council is committed to welcoming and valuing diversity, promoting equality of opportunity and tackling unlawful discrimination in accordance with the Equality Act 2010. The Council, in delivering this Policy, will have regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty and ensure that no individual is discriminated against based on their sex, sexual orientation, marital status, pregnancy and maternity, gender reassignment, race, religion, belief, disability or age.

The Public Sector Equality Duty is a duty on the Council and that responsibility cannot be delegated to a contractor/service provider and is a continuing duty.

This Vulnerable Adults' Housing Policy has been subject to an equality relevance test, to assess any impact it will have on equality.

Ratified at: Housing Board

Date: 15/11/2023

Policy Owner

Corporate Head of Landlord Services