

Vulnerable Tenant Plan

1. Introduction

Maryhill Housing Association aims to maintain balanced and sustainable communities. One of our strategic objectives is to enable better lives. We believe that for a local community to thrive that we as an Association should aim to respond to the needs of all tenants, including those who are vulnerable. Maryhill Housing has a moral responsibility to do what we can to make sure that vulnerable people are able to enjoy a good quality of life and live as independently as possible.

Independence is created by someone having assistance and support when and how they require it. It is not linked to the physical or intellectual capacity of a person to care for themselves without assistance.

Tenancy sustainment is a key business requirement, some tenants who are housed by Maryhill Housing Association experienced homelessness and some are complex cases where it is critical to get the right support in at the right time. This is to maintain and improve sustainability. A sustained tenancy will always be more cost effective than it becomes a crisis situation requiring intensive, expensive emergency support or intervention.

Maryhill Housing will when required enforce the terms of the tenancy agreement. This will happen when a breach of tenancy conditions is established. Examples of this would be when a tenant fails to pay rent, reports of Anti-Social Behaviour, failure to maintain condition of the property or the attached garden. Legal action will be taken against a tenant when a breach of tenancy is established however we recognise that some tenants will require additional support in meeting their obligations. Our main aim is to help tenants sustain the tenancy and to minimise tenancy failure. Eviction will always be a last resort.

This plan supports and is compatible with Maryhill Housing Associations Equality and Diversity Policy which underpins everything that we do.

2. Background – the local context

The current cost of living crisis and the ongoing period of financial austerity with continued reductions being made to public expenditure by the Scottish and UK Government it is clear that many of these changes continue to have a negative impact on vulnerable people and low-income families within our communities.

3. Who is Vulnerable?

Maryhill considers vulnerable as ***anyone who experiences difficulties with everyday living to the extent that they need additional support to make sure they can sustain the occupancy of their home. This definition also applies to a household member where the vulnerability is impacting on the whole household.***

Maryhill Housing Associations approach does not assume that whole groups of people are vulnerable. For example, we do not assume that all older people are vulnerable even though there may be evidence to suggest that many are.

Appendix 1 suggests some categories of people who may be vulnerable, but this is not exhaustive.

Safeguarding and protecting vulnerable groups is everyone's responsibility, Maryhill is promoting among staff 'See it Say it' approach where if any members of staff wither this is customer facing or not ensure that they are aware of their responsibilities of safeguarding and what to do when staff are looking to report concerns about a vulnerable person. Maryhill Housing Association has Adult and Child Protection Policies in place to ensure that all staff are able to recognise when an adult may be at risk of harm and are aware of what they should do is they believe an adult or child is or may be at risk.

4. How this plan was developed

This plan was developed in response to highlighted concerns around vulnerable tenants within tenancies across the sector and how we manage and support these tenants to ensure that they have independence and stability.

The plan was devised in December 2022, this was following a learning from incidents report that established the requirement for the Association to have in place a Vulnerable Persons Plan. That sets out, our Aims and Objectives, key properties and the expectation of our staff when interacting with tenants and customers who may be vulnerable.

Consultation with the housing, property and customer contact teams has also been carried out.

The strategy has also been informed by the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001, the Housing (Scotland) Act 2014 Adult Support and Protection (Scotland) Act 2007, Adults with Incapacity (Scotland) Act 2000, The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 and the National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland 2021 in addition to guidance issued by the Scottish Government, the Scottish Housing Regulator and the Chartered Institute of Housing

5. Aims and Objectives

Vision

Our vision is: *Great homes in strong and thriving communities*

Mission

Our mission is: *Providing great housing and services for our customers, supporting strong, inclusive communities in North West Glasgow*

Values

Our values are to:

- Think customer first
- Take Responsibility
- Embrace Peoples Differences
- Keep improving

Corporate Plan

Maryhill Housing has a long- term strategic objective to enable better lives. The other key objectives are to:

- Improve Customer Experience
- Providing Better Places
- Building a Sustainable Business

We recognise that safeguarding and supporting vulnerable groups can improve customer satisfaction, reduce complaints and void properties becoming vacant. This impacts on void spend and void rent loss and ultimately will improve satisfaction and our management of neighbourhoods.

6. Legal and regulatory requirements

Social Landlords in Scotland have a number of legal and regulatory responsibilities to manage tenancies effectively.

The Scottish Social Housing Charter sets out the standards which tenants and other customers can expect from social landlords.

“social landlords, working in partnership with other agencies, help to ensure that as far as reasonably possible that tenants and other customers live in well-maintained neighbourhoods where they feel safe.”

7. Links to other strategies and policies

Several policies and plans link in with the management of vulnerable tenants, some key examples are listed below

- Adult Support and Protection Policy
- Child Protection Policy
- Allocations Policy
- Anti-Social Behaviour Policy
- Leased Properties Policy
- Pet Policy
- Estate Management Policy
- Rent Arrears Policy
- Complaints Procedure
- Anti Social Procedure
- Rent Management Procedure
- Domestic Abuse Policy

8. How we will manage vulnerable tenants

Maryhill's Vulnerable tenants' plan is to ensure that we are safeguarding our tenants and supporting them to sustain their tenancies.

We will do this by making referrals to highlight any Adult and Child Protection concerns and signpost/make referrals to supporting agencies. Ensure effective case management by the Housing Officer/Property Officer and attending case conferences.

The management of vulnerable tenants is the responsibility of the Housing Officer and guidance on how cases should be managed is contained in the Breach of Tenancy Procedure.

Property Officers and other Officers within the Association are also responsible for reporting concerns to Health and Social Care Partnerships and notifying the Housing Management Team. This plan outlines several key priorities in our management of vulnerable tenants going forward.

Tenancy support and sustainment

We aim to support all our residents to manage and maintain their tenancies and will ensure that our pre-tenancy work with applicants provides clear guidance on how to manage a tenancy.

In many cases it will be more appropriate for assistance to be provided by specialist external agencies following referral from Maryhill Housing Association. Assistance may be time limited with a view to encouraging an individual to alter their lifestyle and/or to gain skills, motivation of confidence to move towards independence. The Association will make referrals to external providers as required.

Adjusting how we deliver a service

If a tenant is vulnerable there may be a requirement for us to adjust our normal working practices to provide a service, we will do this in the following ways:

- Regular and effective contact maintained by the Housing Officer.
- Agreeing a nominated contact person (i.e., case worker, key worker, NOK, carer, family member).
- Providing information in other formats, where agreed by the customer, ensuring the most appropriate means of communication.
- Allowing time for the person to get to door if mobility is reduced.
- Escalating repairs for people who have particular health or vulnerabilities.
- Requesting housing benefit/universal credit payments to be paid directly to the Association.

Providing Aids & Adaptations

Maryhill Housing is committed to tenancy sustainment by providing supporting to those tenants who require it including those who need their home to become adapted to cope with age, disability, or caring responsibilities. Maryhill Housing recognise that being able to access suitable housing or to adapt existing housing can have a positive impact on health whilst contributing to independence, privacy, and dignity.

Maryhill Housing will provide a person-centred approach by ensuring tenants and their family/carers are consulted throughout the adaptation process. This will be done by liaising with OT to consider their recommendations and provide timeframe for completion.

Work to Promote Financial Inclusion

The Housing Management Team will continue to progress referrals to ensure that income for household's and new tenants is maximised. This will be done by offering appointments with our Financial Support Team. Housing Officers will ensure that tenants are aware of funding available through community initiative such as the Customer Kitty, Maryhill Helps and Hardship Fund.

The Community Regeneration Team will continue to submit funding bids that can be reinvested back into the local community – examples of this are funding bids to external agencies to obtain fuel and food vouchers for our tenants.

Our Financial Support Team will continue to deliver a service that is equally accessible and effective to ensure that customer income is maximised, and quality of life is improved. The team will also carry out campaigns to achieve the maximum impact and reach to as many tenants as possible. An example of this is the current counting the cost campaign.

Support Provided by other Agencies

We will progress referrals to support agencies such as Woman's Aid, Victim Support and other relevant support agencies to ensure that any support needs of the tenant are met. This may include contact with previous support agencies to request that the support case is re-opened.

Safeguarding

We will make referrals/notification of concerns to Social Work in relation to both Child Protect and Adult and Support in Protection in line with the Associations Adult and Child protection policies.

Domestic Abuse

Maryhill Housing operates a zero-tolerance policy in relation to domestic abuse. We are committed to ensuring that everyone has the right to live without fear in their home. We will support customers experiencing any form of domestic abuse and takt the strongest action possible against any perpetrations or domestic abuse.

We have pledged to 'Make a Stand' against domestic abuse and have signed up to the Chartered Institute of Housings campaign to tackle domestic abuse.

The Association will encourage all tenants and household members to report domestic abuse and that all reports will be managed in confidence and sensitively. Victims will be encouraged to allow the Association to share information with other agencies to ensure that full range of support can be put in place.

The way that we will manage reports of Domestic Abuse is set out within our Domestic Abuse Policy.

Explaining what we can do and who we will do it

Tenants don't always know what to expect from us when it comes to managing tenancies and how we support tenants or enforce the tenancy agreement.

When we communicate with vulnerable tenants we will always:

- Advise who will deal with their case and when they can expect to be contacted.
- Be clear about how we can help resolve issues within the tenancy.
- Be clear about what we can do to help.
- Be clear about enforcement action that is being taken.
- Explain any assistance available to them.
- Agree responsibilities in resolving the case.
- Agree a plan of action with the resident.

Progressing Cases

When we are taking breach of tenancy action against a tenant who has been highlighted as vulnerable, we will manage cases proactively and take account of previous case management when considering what action should be taken. We recognise that falling to comply with the tenancy conditions maybe a symptom of an individual's vulnerability and this may result in making a referral to specialist support. Employees will be sensitive to the individual's circumstances and use a variety of options to resolve tenancy breaches before the situation escalates or debts become unmanageable. Any written communication will be to confirm and/or reinforce intentions or agreement.

Our Breach of Tenancy Procedure sets out clear guidance to Housing Officers as to what action should be taken and when. However, this has been crated as a guidance document and any cases where there are significant concerns around enforcement should be escalated to the Housing Manager.

When we take breach of tenancy action, we will always follow these principles:

- Where there are continued complaints or lack of engagement from the vulnerable tenant and there is no change in behaviour a Notice of Proceedings should be served on the tenant.
- We will hold internal "case conferences" for high level cases which are not resolved within a reasonable timescale.
- We will ensure appropriate manager oversight of serious cases.

Taking action to evict someone will always be a last resort. The aim of Maryhill Housing is to secure the best possible outcome for our tenant and the surrounding community.

9. Case monitoring

Regular case monitoring will be carried out by Housing Managers who will retain an oversight of all cases and monitor samples of other cases in order to support and coach the Housing Officers and to identify any weakness or areas of concern in our management of vulnerable tenants.

Cases will be monitored quarterly by the Head of Neighbourhoods & Communities to identify any trends and learn any lessons which may be used to improve our management of vulnerable tenants.

A diary code will be set up on the Housing Management System to monitor and record vulnerable tenants to ensure that there is management oversight of these cases.

A vulnerable tenants register will be established which indicates risk levels for each tenant.

10. Keeping customers informed

We will consult regularly with Registered Tenant Organisations (RTOs) to inform our management of vulnerable tenants.

We will publicise this Vulnerable Tenants Plan in our newsletters, on our website and via social media and will include performance information and outcomes of cases, suitably anonymised.

11. Working with other agencies

Working with partner agencies to safeguard vulnerable tenants and to access support is a key priority for us.

We work with a number of agencies to manage anti-social behaviour including.

- Police Scotland
- Health and Care Partnership
- Glasgow City Council
- Drug and Alcohol Services

We will make referrals to Social Work to highlight any areas of concern this will be in relation to both adult and child protection to ensure that any concerns that we have established are recorded and action is taken by Social Work where possible.

In order to ensure that we are working effectively with partner agencies we will;

- Build up information about agencies and charities who work in our areas to ensure that Housing Officers are aware of support agencies for tenants and can make appropriate referrals and maximise the support available to our customers

12. Learning from complaints and performance data

Complaints about our management of tenancies will be monitored quarterly by the Head of Neighbourhood & Communities and this will be used to learn any lessons which may improve our management of vulnerable tenants and to identify any training needs and potential improvements to our procedures.

We will also use our performance data to inform and improve our management of vulnerable tenants.

13. Training and Development

We will provide training to all Housing Officers on the effective management of vulnerable tenants this will be specific training around safeguarding, adult protection and child protection.

We will also ensure that front- line staff are trained in interview skills, case building and evidence gathering, case progression and resolution and documenting information.

Appendix 1

- Older persons who have been identified as requiring support, no next of kin, no contact with family or friends.
- Young person/care leavers who have been identified as requiring support, no next of kin, no contact with family or friends
- Ex-offenders
- Live alone (with no family or no support network)
- Addiction issues
- Learning difficulties
- Mental Health
- Suicidal
- English not 1st language
- Disability / mobility
- Lack of capacity
- Hearing or visual impairment
- Concierge list of no fob access
- Experiencing homeless/repeat homelessness
- Financially excluded (no income/zero hour contracts)
- Hospital Discharge or discharge from institutionalised care
- Ongoing Harassment (Domestic abuse or ASB?)
- experience periods of sustained illness at home
- First tenancy
- Previous tenancy failure